

EVERYDAY WORSHIP:
RECLAIMING THE
TRANSFORMATIVE POWER
OF DAILY WORSHIP

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BY
F. ALAN GRAY

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To Kelley – My Wife & Crown (Proverbs 12:4)

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ABSTRACT

The church in North America has lost its unique and foundational identity as a worshipping community. Worship is seen as something which believers go and do once a week on Sunday mornings rather than the foundation of their identity as a child of God. This project reintroduces the practice of daily worship into the life of the church. The project demonstrates that introducing a church-wide practice of daily worship helps break down the compartmentalization of faith, enriches the believer's sense of connection to the Body of Christ and leads to a greater sense of communion with God throughout the week.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Worship is the ultimate goal of all human creative expression. The Westminster Catechism puts it this way, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever.”¹ We were created with this greater purpose in mind. Inasmuch as our lives embrace that higher goal we will more fully reflect the eternal love, joy and peace of the One who created us. Through the influence of our highly secularized culture the North American church has developed a truncated view of worship. Worship no longer stands at the center of the identity of the church but has become simply another activity in which the church engages itself among a long list of other chores.

This unfortunate trend has often put worship on par with other important yet secondary activities like fellowship gatherings or mission projects. By secondary I do not mean to insinuate that they are less important but that ultimately they exist in order to foster greater worship of God. In that sense it can be said that mission is secondary to worship. Mission activities exist in various places around the world because, as of yet, worship does not. Mission then has a functional and subordinate relationship to worship. At the consummation of all things the mission of sharing the good news will no longer be necessary but worship will continue through eternity.

All other activities within the life of the church derive their meaning within the context of worship. We can fellowship with one another because God himself exists as a holy community of three persons. True Christian fellowship is not just a “horizontal” gathering of human beings but rather a community of miniature “temples” of the living

¹ *Shorter Westminster Catechism, Book of Confessions Study Edition* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1996), 229.

God. And so fellowship gatherings of the Church by definition are a gathering of worshippers. The fact that many fellowship activities don't feel very worshipful is not an indication that they are two separate activities but rather is a demonstration of our own failure to incorporate worship into every facet of life. Paul's call to pray "without ceasing"² is not just a call to a running conversation with God but more fundamentally it is a call to openness and submission to the power of God's constant presence in the heart of the believer. Similarly Paul's charge to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice"³ is not a one-time event but an ongoing sacrificial attitude in everything you do as a disciple of Christ.

Worship has come to be seen as an aspect of a church's corporate life which serves more to entertain than to transform. That's often why even churches with spectacular & highly polished worship services like Willow Creek Community Church see so little spiritual maturity and growth in their members. Renowned Willow Creek Pastor Bill Hybels has confessed, "We made a mistake. What we should have done when people crossed the line of faith and became Christians, we should have started telling people and teaching people that they have to take responsibility to become 'self feeders.' We should have gotten people, taught people, how to read their Bible between services, how to do the spiritual practices much more aggressively on their own."⁴ This important discovery needs to be explored further by asking, "Why does excellence in corporate

² 1 Thessalonians 5:17; all scripture citations are from the New International Version (2011) unless otherwise noted.

³ Romans 12:1.

⁴ "Willow Creek Repents? Why the most influential church in America now says 'We made a mistake,'" Christianity Today's Leadership Journal, last modified October 18, 2007, accessed on September 22, 2015, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2007/october-online-only/willow-creek-repents.html>.

worship seemingly have such a minimal impact on fostering the maturation of Christian disciples?”

Even within the church itself worship is often seen as something which is generally impractical and unrelated to everyday life. The real meat and potatoes of life application has shifted toward the message. A telling trend is that everything within a Sunday morning service was once referred to as a “Service of Worship.” In more recent years the label of “worship” has been relegated to the songs that are sung, thus in the vernacular of the modern church “worship leader” really means “song leader.” Over time even “the service of worship” has suffered from the secularizing effects of the dominant culture. Modern Americans seem uncomfortable with the elements of mystery and sacrifice which were often dominant themes in ancient worship. Rather than pursue the difficult work of educating and helping adapt those concepts to a modern mind they have simply been jettisoned in the name of the contemporary idol of relevancy.

Even a cursory examination of scripture reveals that worship is not just something that the church “does” but rather it is what the church “is.” The apostle Peter describes this “worshipping identity” when he writes, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light”.⁵ The church by definition is a worshipping community of followers of Jesus Christ. In our later, more thorough examination of scripture we will see both the breadth and depth of the Bible’s treatment of worship as the defining characteristic of what it means to be truly human. Worship should never be viewed as simply another item on the church’s weekly “to do” list but the

⁵ 1 Peter 2:9.

foundation on which all those other functions are built. In order for the church to grow and thrive we must recapture the essence of what distinguishes the church from all other human organizations. The church must once again reaffirm the centrality of worship as the foundation of its identity as the Bride of Jesus Christ.

The overarching goal of this project is to help the church rediscover a foundational and biblical understanding of worship. Before mankind's fall into sin our common parents, Adam and Eve, enjoyed the freedom and joy of constant companionship of God in the Garden of Eden. As we seek to reveal God's true reign in the world, we are called to reintroduce the world to the bliss of communion with our Creator. This is in fact the most human endeavor of all! We were created for this very purpose. Our worship then becomes a form of testimony to God's greatness and a portrait of the path to our greatest joy and peace.

As we have reduced the scope of worship it is no coincidence that the scope of the church's influence in society has followed suit. By reducing worship to something which we merely "do" for one hour on one day a week we have hastened its demise as an agent of transformation in the church's life. Marva Dawn cleverly labels the world's perception of worship as "a royal waste of time" and unfortunately many within the church are also adopting a similar point of view.⁶

Sadly, modern believers seem too busy to allow their compartmentalized lives to be interrupted with something as seemingly ephemeral, impractical and downright otherworldly as worship. During my parents' and grandparents' lifetimes daily worship was

⁶ Marva J. Dawn, *A Royal "Waste" of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 1.

not viewed as some novel approach to faith but rather was seen as the normative practice of sincere followers of Christ. It is hoped that this project in some small measure can help the church reclaim an important part of its heritage that has unhappily been lost in just the last couple of generations. It's ironic that in an age when there are more Bible translations, Bible study aids, and varieties of contemporary worship music than ever before that the health, morality and vibrancy of the church is on the decline in North America. A consistent practice of daily worship is one of the great missing pieces in the confounding puzzle that is the modern North American church.

Ministry Setting

I now serve as solo pastor to a church of one-hundred and seventy-five adult members in the small town of Marion, Virginia (population 5,875)⁷ which is nestled in the mountains in the southwest region of the state approximately an hour north of its border with Tennessee. The Royal Oak Presbyterian Church (ROPC) is an historic church having been founded in 1776 by early Scottish settlers and is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (USA). One of the great strengths of this church has been its identity as an “inter-generational” church. One of the themes I have often heard repeated about the ethos of ROPC is that it is a “great church in which to raise a family.” The church feels like an extended family. Worship attendance on most Sundays averages between eighty-five and one hundred. That small size allows the congregation to enjoy a deep sense of community. A feeling of “family” pervades much of the church’s life.

⁷ “Quick Facts: Marion town, Virginia,” United States Census Bureau, last modified July 1, 2014, accessed February 22, 2016, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/5149464>.

The southwestern section of Virginia in which ROPC is located is a mountainous region with a very distinct culture. Former Virginia Senator James Webb's book, *Born Fighting* is a helpful resource which explores the "worldview" of this section of the country often referred to as "Appalachia."⁸ The area was originally settled by Scots-Irish immigrants whose tribalism and cantankerous disposition continues to have an impact. (Full disclosure: I am of Scots-Irish descent. Webb's conclusions ring very true in my own experience of growing up in a similar context in North Carolina. If you've ever been to a presbytery meeting you probably would heartily agree.) Despite modern advances that have made the area more accessible it still remains very "clannish." Outsiders are often distrusted and there is modest respect for authority beyond their own local leaders. There is general suspicion about new concepts whether regarding health (one of the highest rates of tobacco use in the country) or matters of faith (high percentage of very traditional, "King James only" churches). Those living under the poverty level are approximately twenty-three percent of the population which is about sixty percent higher than the national average.⁹ Marion has persistently lost population since the 1980's and now has a population of less than six thousand.¹⁰

When describing ROPC the term "mainline, evangelical" is appropriate. The PC(USA) for the great majority of its long history has held what today would be considered orthodox, evangelical views on most major theological topics, particularly in the southern branch of the church. ROPC falls squarely in this historic, southern,

⁸ James Webb, *Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America* (New York: Broadway Books, 2004).

⁹ "Marion town, Virginia," United States Census Bureau, last modified 2014, accessed February 22, 2016, <http://www.census.gov/search-results.html?q=marion+va&search.x=0&search.y=0&search=submit&page=1&stateGeo=none&searchtype=web&cssp=SERP>.

¹⁰ "Quick Facts: Marion town, Virginia," United States Census Bureau, last modified July 1, 2014, accessed February 22, 2016, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/5149464>.

mainline, evangelical tradition. Its pastoral leadership for the past fifty years has had a decidedly orthodox and evangelical orientation.

ROPC is a conservative church in many senses of the word. The membership has typically been white collar, well educated and Caucasian. The surrounding community is generally less highly educated and decidedly blue collar. Thankfully, over the past ten years the church has begun to more accurately reflect the economic and social diversity of the community. A classic, neo-gothic architectural design of the sanctuary has historically led to a more traditional approach to worship. Although our session and worship planning team have introduced some changes over the past several years on the whole there is still a strong, classic, reformed feel to our service.

Chronically high unemployment in this mountainous area also places extra stress on the family system.¹¹ In the midst of a health crisis or layoff from work the margin for maintaining a healthy marriage becomes even thinner. Among lower income families it is not uncommon for several generations to live within the same home with perhaps only one or two of the adults actually earning an income. The low wage manufacturing jobs that provide a high percentage of the employment in Smyth County are especially vulnerable in an overall weak national economy.

Getting men to be reflective, to open up and talk about their inner life is a real challenge. Obviously this is true for American men in general but even more so for men in southwestern Virginia.¹² It is a very conservative area and a traditional view of gender

¹¹ "Health Disparities Between Appalachian and Non-Appalachian Counties in Virginia USA," National Center for Biotechnology Information, U.S. National Library of Medicine, last modified September 23, 2010, accessed August 4, 2015, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3089820/>.

¹² Webb, *Born Fighting*, 6-12.

roles in marriage is the norm. This conservatism is not necessarily a biblical conservatism so much as a social one. The ideal image of “manhood” is more often a tough “Sylvester Stallone” than a cerebral and more sensitive “Tom Hanks.”

ROPC has a good history of strong marriages. When you consider the church’s elders and others who exert influence in the life of the congregation, the number of marriages which end in divorce is relatively low. At the same time the church does a good job of modeling grace to those experiencing divorce or who are previously divorced. ROPC has the reputation of a warm, loving community of believers. One of the growing edges of the church is outreach to those who are going through the trauma of divorce or rebuilding blended families.

ROPC is blessed with a high proportion of mature, healthy marriages. Many of the younger couples are still growing in their understanding of the demands of marriage and of raising children in “the nurture and admonition of the Lord”.¹³ It was concern for these younger married couples and their children that first prompted the development of some kind of targeted ministry to support these folks. The hope was to use the strength and wisdom of some of the more experienced families to support these younger families as they sought to build a stronger foundation of faith.

A key to building a stronger spiritual foundation for the families of the church is to help these couples and parents rediscover the joy of daily worship. Worship has been almost completely divorced from the realm of everyday life. The rise of secularism in modern American culture is one of the underlying causes which has led to a more

¹³ Ephesians 6:4.

compartmentalized approach to life. In modern, industrial societies “workers” are viewed predominantly from a “productive” standpoint. The value assigned to any particular worker is not related to their basic moral character but rather to their “productivity.” This subtle dehumanization of the American workforce has led to a tendency to divorce the worker’s worldview from their work. As a result most working Americans see little connection between the faith they profess on Sunday and the work they engage in on Monday.

In the basic, agrarian culture which characterized the nineteenth and early twentieth century of American life, the wholeness and integrity of life was more clearly understood. Many historians tie early American prosperity to the “Protestant Work Ethic” in which engaging in so-called “secular work” could be viewed as an expression of personal faith. However, in modern American society people’s lives have become compartmentalized. This has led to a whole generation of American Christians in the workforce who not only see no connection between faith and work but who often see them as utterly incompatible. I once had a church elder tell me, “It’s fine and good, all this ‘turning the other cheek’ stuff when you spend your days going to Bible studies and prayer meetings but when you have to deal with the kind of ‘jerks’ I work with on a daily basis you have a different kind of attitude.” I fear that for many American Christians this is a common sentiment. The gap between faith and daily life has become a wide chasm.

The church has also suffered from the secularizing influences of the surrounding culture not only in the context of their work but in other areas of life as well. The modern emphasis on education has in a sense replaced the pursuit of godliness. A majority of Christian parents seem more concerned that their children attain entrance into a good

college than that they continue in life-long pursuit of faith. As a result the church nationally has lost an entire generation. Outreach through evangelism is obviously fundamental to the church's identity but if the church had simply done a better job of passing on its faith to its own children it would have increased the number of disciples to a much greater extent than even the most effective evangelism program.

ROPC has had a long tradition of fruitful ministry to children and youth. Historically, the passing of faith to the next generation has been one of the hallmarks of the church. However, that sense of intentionality in propagating the faith to the next generation does not seem as deeply rooted among the present young families within the church. There is a noticeable lack of spiritual maturity when comparing the older established families and the ones which are just getting started. There are innumerable causes for this decline but the underlying issue is the growing secularization within our culture. Church was once the social center of most people's lives, but now it competes with sports and other extra-curricular school activities for their attention.

The forces of secularization are unfortunately having a greater impact on transforming the church than the church is having on transforming the surrounding culture. By introducing the practice of family devotions to these younger families it is hoped that they will begin to see the importance of counteracting these secularizing forces. Parents must be encouraged and instructed to once again take up the mantle as God's appointed agents of spiritual formation within the lives of their children. That task of spiritual formation cannot be delegated as the responsibility of others. Parents must realize that the faith-forming process begins the moment the child is born and sovereignly placed in their care.

After spending six years as a youth pastor in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, DC I sensed that something more holistic was needed in order to address the desperate need of spiritual formation of young people. As I sought to build up the faith of the youth in my church I had the distinct impression that I was swimming against the tide. Not only did I have to contend with the dominant, secular culture in which the teens were immersed every day. I also found myself battling a culture within the youth's families (even supposedly "churched" families) which did not place a high value on spiritual formation. It seemed that the most important goal for many of the parents of these teenagers was not that their son or daughter be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ but that they get into the best possible college and attain the highest paying job.

Obviously this problem is a many layered onion and there is no simple cause and effect diagnosis. Part of the issue related to the parents' own lack of spiritual maturity. But on the whole most believing parents are sincere in their faith and well-meaning in their desire to raise "good, Christian" kids. Some of the responsibility for this lack of intentionality among these church-going parents in regard to the spiritual formation of their children must be laid at the church's own doorstep.

Many of these parents desperately wanted their children to develop a personal faith but they had no idea of where or how to begin. In the vast majority of cases they looked to the church and the children's and youth ministries to do this work on their behalf. Perhaps when a young person hits puberty the parents sense their influence waning and the culture's influence increasing. They hit the panic button and try to make up for lost ground and look to the youth leader to save the day. One parent of a teen in

ROPC's youth program once told one of our youth pastors, "We leave teaching that 'faith stuff' up to you guys."

For faith formation to be effective and lasting the faith forming process has to begin at the earliest stages of a child's development. This process cannot be relegated to a once a week Sunday School class or youth meeting. It must be integrated into the everyday life of the child. For the practice of daily worship to really take hold in the life of ROPC it has to be a practice adopted across the generations and include individuals, couples and families.

Thesis-Project

The thesis-project is entitled, "Everyday Worship: Reclaiming the Transformative Power of Daily Worship." By rediscovering the ancient practice of daily worship it is hoped that the church will grow spiritually through closer communion with God, view faith as an integral part of daily living and ultimately mature more fully into Christ-likeness. The spiritual malaise of the church in North America can largely be traced back to the failure of the church to understand its most basic calling-- communion with Christ. This project encompasses three different trials the first of which promotes family worship and the subsequent two trials which primarily encourage worship as an individual.

A corollary to my thesis is that true and lasting change only takes place within the context of worship. We cannot will ourselves to have a new heart. Only God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit can regenerate the human heart and give us both the desire and the ability to be transformed. Faith is not something we can manufacture within ourselves

but is a gift of God. It is within the realm of worship in which we humble ourselves before Him and acknowledge our desperate need for His redeeming work that God can infiltrate our hearts and begin to recreate us from the inside out.

I have employed various techniques within the life of Royal Oak Presbyterian Church to encourage a broader and deeper conception of worship. As I began my studies I vaguely knew that I wanted to grapple with the church's approach to worship. I had a nagging sense that the worship life of the church was not really producing the change in people's lives that I, as their pastor, hoped for them. As I began to understand my congregation better I realized that there was a core group of approximately one fourth to one third of the members who really seemed to "get it." They had a vibrant and growing faith. Their lives exhibited evidence of the fruit of the Spirit.¹⁴ Though not without their own trials, they were able to withstand the turbulence of life in a broken world with grace and a deep faith in a beneficent God. A major portion of our church attended worship and showed up occasionally to other events but often lacked much evidence of spiritual fruitfulness.

I wondered, "What is the difference between more casual 'attenders' and those at 'the core' whose lives truly demonstrate the fruit of faith?" What makes some members of Christ's church seemingly so vibrant in their faith and others seemingly so dead? As I observed the lives of those with a deep faith, one consistent characteristic was a willingness to take personal responsibility for their own spiritual growth. They refused to conform to the dominant cultural pressure to be defined simply as a "consumer" of religion or religious "services." They understood that spiritual maturity is not a

¹⁴ Galatians 5:22-23.

commodity which you can simply buy or consume. Rather growing spiritually is a dynamic process empowered by the Holy Spirit. Maturing in Christ means participating in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and growing in our communion with Him.¹⁵

Worship, as I broadly define it, is communion with God. In order to mature as a disciple of Jesus Christ it is necessary then to gain a deeper and broader understanding of our worship life. Worship cannot simply be something which we “consume” for one hour once a week on Sundays. But rather worship, when understood as our communion with Christ, must be something which becomes a daily if not a moment by moment encounter with our Lord.

As my thoughts progressed I began to see a more practical pattern to the lives of those who exhibited the fruit of being in communion with Christ. For them worship is not just something they do, but is a part of who they are. Worship was not relegated to Sunday mornings but was rather something which they attempted to incorporate into the fabric of their lives. Communing with God did not simply take place once a week in a formal setting but rather was something that they sought out on a daily basis. It was not an activity they “attended” but rather something to which they gave their attention. Instead of being a consumer of a religious product they became a co-producer in a transformational act of re-creation.¹⁶

I then began to formulate a plan. If I could begin to expand our member’s conception of worship and give them some tools to begin to move toward a practice of daily worship then perhaps that core group of committed disciples would begin to expand. My initial

¹⁵ Philippians 3:10.

¹⁶ Philippians 2:12.

hunch was that the reason people were sort of “stuck” in a perpetual state of spiritual adolescence was that they did not perceive their faith as an integral aspect of their daily lives but as something somewhat distant and peripheral. Unfortunately, for many believers their Sunday morning faith has become generally disconnected from the rest of their lives.

What was the answer to this dilemma? The seemingly elusive nature of spiritual maturity is somewhat akin to the reason Jesus gives to his disciples for teaching so often in parables. Jesus said that “The secret of the Kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables.”¹⁷ The secret of the Kingdom of Heaven was the presence of Jesus himself. In a similar way the church is desperately searching for a “magic spiritual pill” which will solve its spiritual malaise when “the secret of the Kingdom of God” has in fact been present all along. The real resource for a spiritually mature church and a dynamic faith will never be found in the latest, “can’t miss” Bible-study-in-a-box, but rather in helping believers re-discover the secret of the Kingdom of God. This secret is what Paul later describes as “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”¹⁸ The pastor’s job is not to somehow magically infer a godly aura on the people once a week, like distributing so much angel dust, but rather to coach them into contact with Jesus as the only One who has the power to create godliness within us.

The church often uses worldly weapons of marketing and manipulation when what is really required is inviting people to re-discover a truth that past generations took as a matter of course. The historic faith of the church was passed down generation to

¹⁷ Mark 4:11.

¹⁸ Colossians 1:27.

generation not through clever marketing but through a real and dynamic encounter with the Risen Christ which produced in them true and lasting transformation. That transformation did not happen overnight or even over the course of a week's worth of revival meetings but most typically through a daily walk with God. That faithful trail was not formed by big "boulders" of occasional fits of spiritual inspiration but by small stones methodically laid down on a daily basis. This daily commitment over a lifetime can build a wide and free flowing pathway to communion with Christ. Daily worship is the true engine of spiritual transformation, which ultimately results in being "conformed to the likeness of his Son."¹⁹ The true agent of spiritual conversion is the Holy Spirit. If Christ-filled saints could wake up to that reality it could unleash a huge untapped reservoir of potential within the Body of Christ in which Jeremiah's prophetic vision would be fulfilled, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest."²⁰

Assumptions

At the most foundational level I am assuming that worship is, at the risk of sounding flippant, worth it. I'm assuming that worship is at the core of what it means to be human and that if we can come to terms with our great created purpose as the underlying answer to the question of "Why are we here?" then we will go a long way in

¹⁹ Romans 8:29.

²⁰ Jeremiah 31:33-34.

discovering how to order our lives. If we were created as worshiping beings then the question is not even so much, “Will we be worshiping people?” but rather, “Whom or what shall we worship?” The answer to that critical question is what ultimately forms the basic fabric of our life in this world and the world to come. In his book *Unceasing Worship*, Harold Best writes,

We are, every one of us, unceasing worshipers and will remain so forever, for eternity is an infinite extrapolation of one of two conditions: a surrender to the sinfulness of sin unto infinite loss or the commitment of personal righteousness unto infinite gain. This is the central fact of our existence, and it drives every other fact. Within it lies the story of creation, fall, redemption and new creation or final loss.²¹

A basic assumption going into the project was that an increase in the practice of daily worship would lead to a greater sense of closeness to God and thus a more impassioned discipleship. Obviously those things are difficult to describe or even measure through a survey or a focus group. It is assumed that qualitative data will be more helpful in getting a sense of the impact of these daily disciplines than a lot of quantitative data. It is hoped that the feed-back tools of surveys and personal interviews will allow people to share at a deeper level and give them the “room” they need to be able to analyze and discuss something that is really impossible to objectively quantify--the quality and intimacy of our relationship with God.

Another assumption was that those engaged in this process were doing it with the intent of increasing their own level of discipleship. Of course, motivations are very hard to gauge. Sometimes even the participants are not necessarily aware of why they have agreed to participate in a particular endeavor. The person may have felt pressure from a

²¹ Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2003), Kindle Locations 134-137.

spouse or other family member to participate. As discussed later in this chapter, one aspect of the final trial was the participants' public declaration of a commitment to an exercise of daily worship. However, any public act of commitment might also motivate some to sign-up out of guilt or a distorted sense of obligation. Yet whether from mixed motives or pure, it is assumed that a pursuit of daily worship is, in general, a healthy endeavor for believers of every level of maturity.

It was assumed that the spiritual discipline of reading scripture is at the heart of any kind of daily worship. While prayer is perhaps the most fundamental spiritual discipline, it is closely connected with the reading of scripture. When prayer is understood as more than a monologue in which we do all the talking but rather a dialogue in which God also speaks to us, then it helps us see the reading of scripture as a sub-set of prayer. It is in His Word that God primarily speaks to us and guides us along the path of His will. A prayerful reading of scripture should serve to inform and energize other forms of prayer. According to polling research the practice of daily prayer is ubiquitous both inside and outside the church.²² Yet regular and consistent Bible reading remains rare. Albert Mohler comments, "Researchers George Gallup and Jim Castelli put the problem squarely: 'Americans revere the Bible--but, by and large, they don't read it. And because they don't read it, they have become a nation of biblical illiterates.'"²³

While there are a multitude of spiritual disciplines that are often neglected by the church, God's self-revelation in His Word is what fundamentally informs and shapes all

²² George Gallop, Jr., "As Nation Observes National Day of Prayer, 9 in 10 Pray -- 3 in 4 Daily," Gallup Inc., last modified May 6, 1999, accessed June 25, 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/3874/nation-observes-national-day-prayer-pray-daily.aspx>.

²³ Albert Mohler, "The Scandal of Biblical Illiteracy: It's Our Problem," Christianity.com, last modified February, 2014, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.christianity.com/1270946/>.

the other disciplines. I have benefited greatly from Richard Foster's modern classic, *Celebration of Discipline* and while each of the spiritual disciplines he highlights can lead to a vitalized relationship with God, God's Word defines and informs them all. My assumption is that the church's immersion into scripture will lead to greater utilizations of the other disciplines in an organic way.

It was assumed that as the individuals who make up our church body grew in their own personal practice of daily worship that it would have a transformative affect on our corporate worship. It was hoped that the practice of private and public worship would invigorate one another and form a constant "loop of renewal" within the life of the church. The Body of Christ should be energized and served by its members and vice-versa. I was unsure of how to quantify this and whatever impact these individual practices have on our corporate worship will remain outside the scope of this study but hopefully would be something to be explored in greater depth in the future.

In order to make real and lasting change in the church it was assumed that the reestablishment of daily worship must be addressed within an inter-generational context. If a practice of daily worship is instilled at a young age I'm assuming that such a practice will be much easier to maintain or "pick back up" later as an adult. Adults who have never grown up with a practice of daily worship will need to be much more intentional and self-disciplined in establishing such a practice.

It seems that the earlier a pattern of daily worship is developed the better. Studies have consistently shown that faith formation happens at a younger age than many people

often assume. According to the Christian pollster George Barna a large percentage of born again Christians make a faith commitment before reaching the age of thirteen:

The current Barna study indicates that nearly half of all Americans who accept Jesus Christ as their savior do so before reaching the age of 13 (43%), and that two out of three born again Christians (64%) made that commitment to Christ before their 18th birthday. One out of eight born again people (13%) made their profession of faith while 18 to 21 years old. Less than one out of every four born again Christians (23%) embraced Christ after their twenty-first birthday. Barna noted that these figures are consistent with similar studies it has conducted during the past twenty years.²⁴

As many church commentators over the years have pointed out the church's development of "Sunday School" during the early parts of the twentieth century while well intended had many unintended and even counter-productive consequences. As it was originally envisioned Sunday School was intended as an outreach to children whose parents were not involved in the life of the church and not concerned with the Christian Education of their children. As with many programs that the church has developed over the years it had unintended consequences the reverberations of which we still see today.

One of the unintended consequences of taking on this mantle of Christian education for un-churched children was that church-going parents began to have their children attend these classes as well. Over time these church-going parents began to see Sunday School not just as a supplement or enrichment of what they were already teaching at home but as a replacement for their own home-based efforts of biblical instruction and faith formation. I'm quite confident that the originators of the Sunday School movement would be deeply troubled if they learned that in the modern American church, the vast

²⁴ "Evangelism Is Most Effective Among Kids: Research Releases in Family & Kids," The Barna Group, last modified October 11, 2004, accessed November 3, 2015, <https://www.barna.org/component/content/article/5-barna-update/45-barna-update-sp-657/196-evangelism-is-most-effective-among-kids#.VnWM-vkrLrc>.

majority of Christian parents have ceded their roles as the primary agents of spiritual formation to the church's Sunday School and youth programs.

Faith formation is something much too organic and individualized to leave to any church program which is often guided by a mass produced curriculum. A Sunday School teacher, no matter how dedicated and well prepared, simply doesn't have the time or intimacy of relationship required to make up for unengaged parents. Parents have the unique opportunity to incarnate their faith to their child on daily basis. That kind of daily contact simply cannot be replicated in any other way.

That is not to say that the involvement of another adult, besides the parent, can't be a crucial factor in faith formation. If a person has been in the life of the church for very long, they most likely have heard testimonies of young people whose faith was deeply impacted by a concerned adult. Oftentimes a teacher or a coach or pastor or youth leader may take special interest in a particular child and become one of the key individuals who lead them to Christ. Yet the groundwork for that spiritual harvest was often done by faithful parents. And unfortunately there are more children in need of direction and guidance than there are adults willing to offer it. And so the percentage of youth which the church retains into adulthood on the whole has been on a downward slide for the past forty years. As a result the church has lost a whole generation of potential Christ-followers. As some church observers have noted many of these young people have been "inoculated" with just enough Christianity so that they have become immune to a genuine faith. In order to reverse this decades long trend parents must reclaim their irreplaceable and strategic role as the primary faith-shapers in their

children's lives if the church in North America is to grow or even survive into the twenty-second century.

Methodology & Parameters of the Project

Living out the new covenant promise means helping the individual members of the church rediscover something that has been lost in the life of the church. My hope was to get the people of our church engaged in worship not just on Sunday mornings but in the midst of their hectic, daily lives. A generation ago daily worship was a natural part of the fabric of many American Christians' lives. But through various circumstances and cultural forces which I will discuss later, the rhythm of daily worship was lost. My methodological approach was built around an attempt to re-establish that daily rhythm of worship.

There is much written about worship yet most discussions of worship center on corporate expressions of worship. There has been relatively little attention given to developing a theology of daily personal worship. I knew that my approach to encouraging a more robust practice of daily worship would have to be adaptable to the various contexts in which each person lived. Worship doesn't happen in a vacuum but in the crucible of relationships. So depending on the individual's context I wanted to develop an approach to daily worship which would be flexible enough to work in the context of a person living on their own, a married couple or within an inter-generational family unit.

We all function as both individuals and as members of a larger society of human beings. Therefore any discussion of life of worship must take into account all the various

contexts of human communities. For example I worship as an individual but I also worship within the context of marriage with my wife and as a father with my three children. Beyond these familial associations I am also involved in communities of worship within the life of the church. The church itself is a community of communities: I am a part of a weekly men's breakfast fellowship, often have participated in a morning prayer group and work with our church board and various ministry teams.

Part of the challenge of promoting the practice of daily worship is that each member's daily pattern of life is so unique. You cannot just speak of "daily worship" in a generic sense but must create a structure that is flexible and resources that meet people where they are. Therefore my project took place in two stages. First I worked with young families in an attempt to promote family worship. And secondly I worked with individual adults and youth in promoting individual worship.

Methodology: First Trial - Young Families

I looked at the family in the context of worship and wanted to help families realize that worship is not just a Sunday activity but that it is in fact the frame within which we live out our entire lives. I developed a series of family devotions which I gave to ten different families within my congregation to help them establish a pattern of family worship on a regular basis. In talking to some of our young parents I quickly decided that to promote daily worship would be too lofty a goal for the majority of our families. Daily worship was a new concept to many of the parents themselves and so to ask them to lead

something they had never done themselves felt like asking them to take a day-hike up Mt. Everest.

I developed a simple curriculum that families in our church used in the hopes of “whetting their appetite” for family worship. My hope was to help all the families in our church establish a regular pattern of worship. As I developed this project and received feed-back I realize that how one defines “regular” really impacts your whole concept of family worship. As I’ve read through the feed-back forms I realize that my real goal was not to have the parents commit to a specific number of devotions or times of family worship per week but rather to initiate a conversation that will hopefully be an ongoing dialogue about their roles as the primary agents of spiritual formation in their child’s life. How that works itself out within the context of each individual family is so varied that it is difficult to define “regular.” Defining “regular” was a part of the important discussion with which the parents wrestled.

I know that in my own family’s life there is often nothing “regular” about orchestrating family worship. We have a goal of having family devotions three or four times a week (an “every-other-night” goal due to church, school & sports commitments). This has gotten much more difficult as the kids have gotten older and involved in more and more activities. Flexibility is crucial due to constantly changing schedules. Sometimes devotions take place at breakfast, at other times during dinner or may involve reading together at bedtime. That’s why teaching children and youth to learn to feed themselves spiritually is the ultimate goal. The “in-between” times often involve less formal but nonetheless intentional “faith forming” activities such as scripture memorization over breakfast; prayers at meals; prayers and confessions of faith at

bedtime (using the Lord's Prayer or Apostles' Creed). It was challenging to give some definition to family worship so as to make it understandable and tangible but not defining it so narrowly that it became just another activity that the parents would feel pressured to check off as part of their "to-do" list. Giving credence to both form and freedom are important aspects of helping both families and individuals develop a healthy and holistic approach to worship. Worship doesn't have to happen around the kitchen table but can take place in the car as worship songs are sung or lying on a blanket in the yard gazing up at a star-filled night's sky.

One of my goals for this devotional resource was to make it simple, short, practical and realistic. The target audience for this resource was the younger families in our church most of whom I suspected had never done family devotions or worship before. That hunch was later confirmed in the survey. I am defining younger families basically as those families with children twelve years of age and under. I decided to gear it toward these younger families with the hope that I could help them first see the value of family worship and then hopefully help them toward a longer term goal of establishing worship as a part of the fabric of their family's life.

In recruiting families to take part in this project I made an intentional effort to first talk with the fathers and help them understand the concept and agree to take part. I determined to use this approach in part due to a biblical understanding of the Apostle Paul's teaching on head-ship.²⁵ I believe Paul is advocating that the Husband/Father is called to Christ-like, sacrificial leadership in the home and is its chief servant. The

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:3.

husband is the one called to initiate spiritual formation.²⁶ This teaching runs counter to our culture but is one that I believe can transform family life.

Getting dads on board was a strategic move as well. I didn't want the men to get the impression that this was just another part of their wives' role as "director of family education." If you look at ROPC's Sunday School teachers over the past ten years probably eighty percent of them have been female. Often anything that is related to education is stereotyped as a mother's role; for example our local PTA is ninety percent female. I wanted to convey to both moms and dads that this was to be a "family devotion" including both parents and not just an additional aspect to the mother's role. Many church commentators have noted a trend over the last fifty years toward "the feminization of the church."²⁷ Sadly, men often feel "less spiritual" than their wives and can suffer from a low sense of "spiritual self-esteem." It's important to remind husbands and fathers of their vital role as the spiritual "initiators" and leaders in the home.

All ten families which were invited to participate in the project agreed to take part. This seems to be an indication of a deep hunger on the part of parents for guidance on how to instruct their children in the faith, although some may have felt pressure to simply say "yes" to their pastor. In the end only one family found the experience unproductive due to their children's young age (3 years old).

Each family was asked to complete an "Initial Family Questionnaire,"

²⁶ Ephesians 5:25-27.

²⁷ John Eldridge, *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secrets of a Man's Soul* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 7ff.

given a copy of the four week, twelve lesson curriculum²⁸ and given a copy of *The Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally Lloyd-Jones on which the curriculum was based.²⁹ The resources were distributed but no specific schedule or deadline for completion was articulated, which in retrospect may have been a mistake. Great effort was made to communicate to the families that this devotional program was not meant to be a burden on them, but rather a resource for them to use how they saw fit and on their own schedule.

Methodology: Second Trial - Individuals (Adults & Youth)

The second stage of the project involved providing individuals with resources which would encourage daily worship on a more personal basis. I considered different approaches to promoting this within the life of the congregation.

Church members were solicited who would commit to a practice of daily worship for eight weeks. Eventually twenty-five folks expressed their willingness to commit to this discipline. Unfortunately, many of our members see little connection between what they experience in Sunday morning worship with what they encounter in “the real world” come Monday morning. One hope I had in promoting these daily readings was to help our folks make the connection between worship on Sunday and their day to day lives Monday through Saturday.

²⁸ Results of the “Initial Family Questionnaire”, the “Follow-up Questionnaire” and a copy of the curriculum can be found in Appendix A.

²⁹ Sally Lloyd-Jones, *The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name* (Grand Rapids, MI, Zonderkidz, 2007).

In an attempt to think strategically about what would help foster that connection scripture passages were chosen which related to the scriptures and themes discussed during worship on Sunday. The aim was to promote the sermon not just as a standalone, “one off” kind of event but the beginning of a continuing dialogue with the Scriptures. The goal was also to promote a kind of ongoing, inner-church dialogue about what the Spirit is saying to the church as a whole.

Part of a pastor’s duty is to help his or her flock take personal responsibility for their own spiritual growth. While all of the spiritual disciplines have an important personal component, they should not be seen as exclusively private affairs. Both couple and family devotions obviously have more of a “built-in” communal aspect but I believe it is helpful to have that same “communal awareness” even as we practice what might otherwise be considered strictly personal disciplines. Obviously Jesus at times went off by himself to “lonely places”³⁰ but the vast majority of His worship life which is recorded in the Gospels took place within the context of the community of believers in corporate worship.³¹

In a sense our understanding of worship is a little backwards. We think of the Sunday service as preparing us for the week ahead and so it should. But perhaps we should also think of our daily work, throughout the week, as helping to prepare us for corporate worship on the Lord’s Day. It is appropriate to expect that the Sunday sermon should encourage your faith and help equip you for the week ahead. But consider how much more effective that message would be if each individual worshiper would have

³⁰ Luke 6:12.

³¹ cf. Luke 4:33; 13:10; Mark 3:1.

spent the previous week reflecting on those same texts and preparing their hearts to listen to God's Word. It's akin to a classical musician practicing throughout the week in preparation for the great orchestral concert on Sunday. The concert becomes the mighty crescendo of a week full of individual practice. We should consider the individual and more private times of communion with God as preparatory work for the more communal practice of corporate worship. Thus daily personal worship would not be viewed as a replacement for corporate worship but rather a practice which drives the believer toward it and enriches it.

As the model for the daily readings was developed it was decided to assign texts in the first two days (Monday & Tuesday) which looked back at the sermon and scripture texts from the previous Sunday as a way of promoting further reflection. Texts for Wednesday through Saturday readings were selected which looked ahead to the following Sunday's sermon text.

In this particular church there is a strong tradition of biblical literacy. There are a number of laymen and laywomen who are excellent Bible teachers. For a significant portion of the church's recent history (over the past fifty years or so) there has been an intentional emphasis on reading and studying the scriptures. For at least the past thirty years many members have been challenged to read through the Bible each year. The church regularly provided "Reading Guides" which would list the daily readings for each day. Oftentimes it included a reading from both the Old & New Testaments. These guides were generally distributed in the monthly church newsletter.

Among our membership there is a small, dedicated constituency which reads through the Bible every year and in some cases multiple times a year. However, that number represents only a small percentage of the church. A large majority of the church's members seem somewhat intimidated by that goal. The causes for this intimidation factor are myriad and varied. Many folks I have spoken with make it sound as if that kind of discipline is beyond them and only applicable to the "super Christians" in the church. This sense of intimidation seems to discourage many from not only reading through the Bible in a systematic way but from reading the Bible in any kind of disciplined manner.

I've often tried to free people from the burden of others' expectations in terms of exactly how much or little of scripture one should read on a daily basis. In point of fact, for most of the church's history the great majority of believers were illiterate and the only scripture they could meditate on were those passages which they heard others read on Sunday morning or passages they may have memorized. It also must be recognized that there are different personality types and that as Dr. David Currie remarked during a lecture "not every spiritual discipline fits every personality."³² So while I promoted the reading of scripture as an essential foundation for daily worship and assigned particular passages for each day I didn't want it to feel like a straight-jacket. I wanted to foster a sense of freedom for each individual to engage in daily worship as they felt led by the Holy Spirit and not feel constrained to fit into a particular mold.

In preparation for this eight week trial I first developed my sermon outline for those weeks. During this period I preached out of the book of Acts. I then began to

³² Currie, David. 2009. "Pastoral Skills." Lecture, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Charlotte, NC, February 8.

develop a list of scripture readings which built on these sermon texts. The sermon schedule and associated texts were announced in our church's monthly newsletter. Then over the course of the next eight weeks, beginning May 15, 2011, the daily readings and reflection questions for each text were printed in the weekly bulletin.³³ The passages and reflection questions were also emailed to each member of the trial group in case they missed Sunday worship and also in case they misplaced the reading schedule in the bulletin.

At the conclusion of the eight weeks I sent out a survey to all those who had participated.³⁴ Unfortunately, the rate of return on this initial survey was very poor. I only received five surveys back from the twenty-five I sent out for a return rate of only twenty percent. However, the ones I did get back were very thorough and of a high quality and offered a lot of feedback. But that lack of return was discouraging and made me question how widely the readings were utilized. To be frank that set-back sort of took the wind out of my sails for my entire project and I floundered for some time wondering what course correction to make in order to salvage my overall goal of promoting daily worship.

Methodology: Third Trial – Individuals (Adults & Youth)

With a “let's go back to the drawing board” kind of attitude I began to rethink how I might better promote a daily reading program. While I took pride in my “home-made” reading plan I began to wonder, “Surely, I'm not the only pastor who has struggled to get his congregation to read their Bibles and worship on a regular basis.” I

³³ See Appendix B for a sample of the readings & reflection questions.

³⁴ See Appendix B.

then thought that I shouldn't try and re-invent the wheel. There were many highly developed programs for encouraging Bible reading and daily worship that I had seen over the years. Surely there must be something out there that might have more appeal and a more sophisticated, for lack of a better word, "marketing" approach.

I looked at materials from various para-church ministries and publishing companies. There are all sorts of Bible reading strategies from "Read the Bible in ninety days" to learning the "story" of the Bible over the course of a year. What I finally settled on was a program developed by a para-church ministry named "Scripture Union."³⁵ I had never heard of this ministry until I had begun researching for an attractive, user-friendly Bible reading and daily worship program. Scripture Union was started in 1867 in London by Joseph Spiers as an informal Christian outreach to children whom he invited to meet together in his living room. The ministry expanded over the years and eventually developed outreach materials for adults as well as various Bible reading plans and prayer guides.

The specific program that caught my eye was one entitled, "The Essential One Hundred" or "E100" for short. In this plan the ministry has identified what they consider the one hundred essential passages of the Bible which best give an overview of the Bible's story. They have selected fifty passages from the Old Testament and fifty passages from the New Testament. Churches may choose whether to do those one hundred readings over the course of one hundred days or spread it out to twenty weeks. I chose to spread it out to twenty weeks so that it would be a little less intimidating and

³⁵ More information regarding this ministry can be found on their website: www.scriptureunion.org.

might appeal to a larger number of people. By having five readings a week each person would have a couple of days of “grace” in which to catch up in case of falling behind. In preparing this second trial method I hoped to appeal to a greater number of those members who seemed intimidated by the whole notion of reading their Bible on a regular basis.

In order to make a greater connection between the daily readings from the “E100” plan and the corporate life of the church I chose sermon texts for the following Sunday from one of the previous week’s five readings. To further enhance the connection, the Wednesday evening adult Bible study was dedicated to the study of some of those same passages. Desiring to learn from previous missteps, it was hoped that this five day reading model would prove more universally appealing and achievable. The revamped program was launched at the beginning of January, 2012 to take full advantage of the psychological effect of beginning a new year with a new discipline.

The congregation was challenged toward a higher participation rate by setting a goal of one hundred participants, again building on the “one hundred” theme. In order to increase visibility of the program a theme of “Rebuilding the Wall!” was developed utilizing Nehemiah 3:17 as a theme verse, *“Come let us rebuild the wall.”* Three inch by eight inch, red, cardstock “bricks” were included in the weekly bulletin. Congregants were invited to sign their name and add their brick to the “wall of faithfulness” which was simply a tri-fold, cardboard display in the front of the sanctuary. By the end of the sign-up period eighty-four participants had committed to the program which was somewhat short of the goal but almost a four-fold increase over participation in the earlier trial.

Following the twenty-week program a survey was sent out.³⁶ Acutely aware of the poor return rate of the earlier survey, several different strategies were employed to encourage a higher response rate. First of all the survey was simplified and shortened so that it fit on one sheet of paper. The earlier survey consisted of more discussion-type questions and required the respondents to write rather extensively. On this second trial greater care was taken to make sure that the majority of questions would simply require numerical grading on a scale (generally on a scale of 1-10). A self-addressed, stamped envelope was also included so as to simplify the return process. In this second go-around thirty surveys were received back. This represented a thirty-six percent rate of return which almost doubled the rate of return of the earlier trial. It also represented a six-fold increase in the total number of surveys received. Some of the survey responses were followed up with personal interviews. Later in chapters four and five the results of these surveys will be presented. These tools provided invaluable information which demonstrated both the strengths and weaknesses of the project. They also helped to identify possible future areas of study and exploration related to encouraging daily worship in the life of the church.

Promoting a practice of daily worship will not come easily. It involves a change of habits and behavior but more fundamentally it involves a change of the heart. Going through the mechanics of a daily devotional will have little effect on the participants if it is simply done out of a sense of religious obligation. What is also needed is a change on the inside which can only be accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit.

³⁶ See Appendix C.

In the next chapter we will consider the theological and biblical foundations which undergird this desire to weave daily worship into the fabric of everyday life. Hopefully as we explore these biblical foundations it will become clear how central a life of worship is for the Christ-follower. Through a survey of the scriptures, it will become apparent that one's communion with God is not something which can be manufactured through human effort but ultimately derives from God Himself.

CHAPTER TWO: THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

King David prays in Psalm 86:12, “I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever.” The scripture’s persistent call to glorify God is humankind’s greatest purpose and this fundamental assertion serves as the basic theological foundation of this thesis. The Bible is God’s revelation about Himself. God has chosen to reveal Himself in order to call us into a relationship with Him. God wants us to know how to appropriately respond to Him and His initiating love. The logical and most basic response to God’s self-revelation as Sovereign Lord is worship.

One of the great scriptural images which illustrate the centrality of worship for the believer, and which we will discuss more later on, is the Apostle Paul’s image of the body as the temple of God.¹ Worship then is not a luxury item in the “body-temple” of the Christian but rather the focal point and its very reason for being. In the age old tension between faith and works worship is sometimes seen as an extravagant activity which should only be done once the other, “real” work is completed. In fact worship is itself a good work and in turn every truly good work is an act of worship.

Human beings love to categorize and compartmentalize life so that it can be carried out with less effort. There can be justifiable reasons for this. None of us are self-disciplined enough to imbue every act of daily living with deeper meaning. Brother Lawrence’s concept of “practicing the presence of God” is brilliant and I have personally benefitted greatly from this idea over the years, yet sometimes washing the dishes at the

¹ 1 Corinthians 3:16.

end of a long, hard day is just washing the dishes. Of course, laziness of thought and lack of intentionality can become just another form of idolatry.

Compartmentalization on a consistent basis becomes yet another manifestation of bowing to a god of self-comfort and self-ease. It is easier not to have to think about how our faith is carried out in our workplace or in the home or at school and so we just choose not to do so. This lack of intentionality can easily become habitual. Rather than do the hard work of thinking through how we might make our daily activities an expression of worship we mentally hang our faith on a hook by the door and pick it up again on our way out. So the challenge for the church is to help its members learn to integrate their faith into their daily living. In order to do this we must first wrestle with the theological and biblical concept of worship as both an activity and a lifestyle.

Older Covenant Theology of Worship

Any Hebraic understanding of worship must begin where the Bible itself begins. In Genesis 1:1 we read, "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*" The beginning of the Bible gives us a gigantic clue about the nature of existence and life as we know it: It all begins with God. At its heart the Bible is a book about God. It is God's story of Himself as related through various human characters.

The universe and human existence are not closed loops neither are they ends unto themselves, but rather they were created. The fact that we are created beings has huge implications for how we are to live our lives. If we concede the idea that we are created then that begs certain questions: What is the Being who created us like? What are the

parameters within which this Creator allows His creation to exist, grow and thrive? What was the Creator's purpose in creating humankind?

As Christians we assert that God created us and the universe and therefore He has the right to define what we are and why we exist. As the story of God's creation of the universe unfolds we see other foundational truths about ourselves. Later on in chapter one of Genesis we read,

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."²

As beings made in God's image we are by nature relational creatures. As classic commentators such as Augustine³ and Calvin⁴ have observed God says, "*Let **us** make mankind in **our** image...*", thus suggesting that even before the creation began God Himself existed as a community of persons.⁵ For those who embrace the Trinitarian conception of God these divine persons are most commonly identified as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As a creature made in God's image man was not created to exist unto himself but to live in communion with both the Creator and his fellow creatures. Though the

² Genesis 1:26-28.

³ Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. E.B. Pusey (Seattle, WA: Amazon Public Domain Book, 2012), 232 & 247, Kindle.

⁴ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2003), 92.

⁵ It should be noted that the use of plural pronouns in this passage is variously interpreted. This more traditional interpretation has been challenged by some commentators. However, while the Divine image could be shared by other beings present (such as angels, as put forth as an alternative explanation by some) that line of thought must also assume co-agency on the part of these other, unidentified heavenly beings in the act of creating humankind ("Let us make...") which cannot be reconciled with other biblical passages (cf. Is 37:16; Ps 139:13; 1Cor 6:3).

original Hebrew audience would obviously not have read this text with a Trinitarian understanding, as those who stand on the other side of the Incarnation we now view each part of scripture in light of the whole of scripture. This includes the New Testament which develops a fuller understanding of the Trinity⁶ and more specifically describes the primacy of Christ's presence and activity at the time of the creation.⁷

In the second chapter of Genesis we see the need for companionship clearly enunciated by God, "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'"⁸ The Lord formed other creatures out of the ground and brought them to Adam to name,

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said,
"This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman,'
for she was taken out of man."

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame (Gen 2:20b-26).

God knew that it was "*not good for man to be alone*" and interestingly puts forth other creatures as companions but none are found until God creates Eve "out" of Adam and brings them together as husband and wife. The physical union of becoming "one flesh" symbolized a deeper spiritual union as well. Sadly this sweet communion does not seem to have lasted very long.

⁶ cf. Mt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14.

⁷ cf. John 1:1-3; Col 1:15-16.

⁸ Gen 2:18.

In the story of the Fall we see the bitter consequences of our human drive for independence and autonomy. After disobeying the Lord's explicit command to not eat of the forbidden fruit Adam and Eve hide away when the Lord initiates contact.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."⁹

Unfortunately, our hiding from God has never stopped. We continue to flee from God's presence. We continue to live out of fear of being exposed to the penetrating gaze of God. But instead of being something to fear or dread we should look on our encounters with God as something supremely powerful. Only God's gaze can see through the opaque layers of our clouded hearts which are obscured even to ourselves. Only an encounter with God can truly bring the bright and healing light of Truth to bear on our sin-sick souls.

It's really no surprise that worship and communion with God has to be continuously rediscovered and reclaimed. Every subsequent generation since Adam and Eve has tragically played out the same role of hiding "among the trees" while God patiently and kindly seeks out His children. Unfortunately, the "trees" available to hide behind seem to have increased tenfold! Our prosperous and technologically advanced society has developed an endless number of hiding spots. We can now hide by watching television, surfing the internet or "posting" to social media sites. We can easily so entangle ourselves in a virtual world that the real world seems unresponsive and dull by comparison.

⁹ Gen 3:8-10.

Not long ago our family hosted a party for our teenaged children and their friends complete with a bonfire in the backyard. Babysitting the large fire was hot work and so after the initial blaze had diminished to a more manageable size I came inside for a quick drink. Once inside it seemed strangely quiet to me. As I glanced around the corner into our den I saw about a dozen teenagers sitting around the perimeter of the room quietly peering at their phones. When I asked what they were doing my son said simply, “Texting.” And I said something only half under my breath, “Why don’t you just talk to the people who are here and not to the people who aren’t here?” As sons and daughters of Adam and Eve we hide from one another and from God. Reestablishing a practice of daily worship would help those sincerely desiring a closer communion with God a mechanism by which the walls of isolation could be broken down. As we learn to open up to God’s presence we are enabled to remain more open to one another.

As bearers of the Divine image we exist to be in relationship. Unfortunately the introduction of sin at the Fall broke humankind’s relationship with God and made human relationships fraught with difficulty and marked by selfishness and pride. Thus the main activity of humankind should be to seek to restore that which has been lost. Yet our sin makes it impossible for us to save ourselves. In response to this crisis God initiated a plan of salvation to restore what had been so deeply broken by sin. Through the prophet Jeremiah the Lord declares that He will establish a new covenant which He will, “write on their hearts.”

“The days are coming”, declares the Lord,
“when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah.
It will not be like the covenant
I made with their ancestors

when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,
though I was a husband to them,”
declares the Lord.
“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel
after that time,” declares the Lord.
“I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.
No longer will they teach their neighbor,
or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest.”¹⁰

In other words this new covenant would not be something external to God’s people as was the case with the older covenant law, but rather internal. “Knowing” God would not be something which needs to be passed from one neighbor to the next but more directly revealed into heart of the believer. This suggests both greater intimacy and greater initiative on the part of God in the life of the worshiper.

This new way of relating to God cannot come through greater human effort but by God doing a new work in us. Ezekiel refers to this new work when he speaks of God’s people having “a new heart.” In Ezekiel 36:24-28 we read,

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God.

God’s gifting of a new heart means that we are changed not just through greater personal exertion but through God working in us. Thus our practice of worship cannot

¹⁰ Jeremiah 31: 31-34.

simply be achieved through force of will but by humbly and actively surrendering our life to Him.

New Covenant Theology of Worship

Jesus' Theology of Worship

Jesus modeled a life that longed to worship. Like all good Jews Jesus appears to have attended synagogue each Sabbath day and celebrated many of the Jewish feasts with other pilgrims in Jerusalem. In Luke's gospel we read, "(Jesus) went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, *as was his custom*."¹¹

Jesus not only attended worship regularly but also taught with regularity as well. His teaching was so powerful that the people were "astonished." While Jesus wanted to bring a deeper understanding to the worship of the Jewish people he also honored the traditions of his people. He submitted to their religious practices while bringing a spirit of rejuvenation.

Even though Jesus valued the Sabbath and attended synagogue with his community it is important to note that his practice of worship was not limited to a formal worship setting or particular place. In fact the great majority of the gospel stories of Jesus preaching and teaching and healing do not in fact take place in any kind of religious setting but rather by the sea, or on a hillside or in a private home. Mark describes one

¹¹ Luke 4:16.

such occurrence, “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: ‘Everyone is looking for you!’ ”¹² The disciples seemed to fail to understand the great need for Jesus to commune personally and privately with His heavenly Father.

Jesus’ interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well is also illustrative of His theology of worship. When the woman echoed an ancient dispute between Samaritans and Jews about the appropriate location for worship Jesus rejected her supposition that the question of location was even relevant. He responded to her saying,

“Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”¹³

Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that the location of worship is not really all that important. The Temple in Jerusalem was never meant to be the ultimate focus of worship. In fact as we’ll discuss later in the new heaven and new earth there is no need for a temple for God himself is fully present and it is His Holy Presence that forms the basis of the concept of “temple.” A bricks and mortar temple would be unnecessary and inferior to God’s fully manifested presence. The temple was a “type” or sign which pointed to a deeper reality.

¹² Mark 1:35-37.

¹³ John 4:21-24.

The deeper truth is that God has always desired to commune with His children. The ultimate expression of this is God desiring to dwell in the hearts of His people through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As a new covenant community tutored by Jesus we now understand more fully that this internal imposition of the law will come through the agency of the Holy Spirit, the “Guide” to whom Jesus refers in John 16:13-15:

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.

Since the followers of Christ can benefit fully from the internal guidance of God’s Spirit, it fundamentally changes the central mode of worship. In the New Testament no longer is worship centered on a central geographic place or building but rather it is centered on wherever the believer goes in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pauline Theology of Worship

Paul further develops the implications of the New Covenant in the life of the believer. In the New Covenant the outpouring of the Holy Spirit into the heart of each individual who surrenders their lives to Christ as Lord and Savior completely transforms the notion of “temple” and “sacred space.” To the Corinthians Paul writes, “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor

God with your bodies.”¹⁴ This conception of the believer’s body as God’s temple forces us to think very concretely and “incarnation-ally” about worship. Worship is not just something which engages the interior parts of ourselves – our mind, heart and soul – but our physical bodies as well.

The image of being a temple of God also alludes to the fact that we must cooperate with God’s work. While the Holy Spirit initiates and empowers this work we also must participate in order for God’s work to come to its fullest expression within ourselves. In Galatians 5:25 Paul puts it this way, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” Yes it is the Spirit that gives us life but we are not just passive passengers. We are called to be active walkers and “keep in step with the Spirit.”

Paul also uses the image of the body as way to illustrate the communal nature of our faith. Paul writes, “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.”¹⁵ Note that Paul refers to both the individual Christian and the community of believers as “God’s temple.” Yet in both circumstances the concept of temple has been permanently transformed from an earthly, man-made structure in a particular geographic location to the bodies of the believers themselves.

In Romans 12:4-5 Paul discusses how this corporate Body of Christ functions together, “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each

¹⁴ 1 Cor 6:19-20.

¹⁵ 1 Cor 3:16-17.

member belongs to all the others.” So not only does our individual body function as a temple of God’s presence but in another even more powerful sense we together as a community of believers form “one body.” He states it even more explicitly in 1 Corinthians 12:27, “Now you [plural form] are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” This has important implications for how we conceive of and practice worship. Worship is not just what we do as individuals but also what we do corporately.

Paul builds on this corporate image of all God’s people forming a “holy temple” in Ephesians when he writes,

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.¹⁶

The notion of “being built together” suggests that our corporate identity is a constant work in progress. Therefore we should not be discouraged when we as a church fail to live up to that ideal. We must realize that this common “dwelling” is a goal toward which God’s Spirit is moving us.

Petrine Theology of Worship

The disciple Peter uses rich images from the older covenant to describe our function as a worshiping body of believers.

¹⁶ Eph 2:19-22.

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.¹⁷

The image of being “a holy priesthood” harkens back to the older covenant of worship in the Temple of Jerusalem. A priest served in the temple as a representative of the people and would offer various sacrifices on their behalf as a means of intercession. By logical extension then we too as a people of God should in our worship practices function in a similar way. We should consider what being “intercessors” on behalf of the community might mean for us and our practices of worship. There was not just one priest but rather an entire clan of priests, the Levites. In a similar way we should not function as intercessors with the impression that we are merely acting as individuals. Rather we are members of a family of servants called to serve those in greatest need of God’s peace and restorative presence.

Johannine Theology of Worship in Revelation: Worship in Community

The Revelation of John gives us a unique glimpse into the realities of heavenly worship. The Revelation was given to John as an encouragement to John and the early church community which was undergoing severe persecution. From an earthly perspective it appeared as though those forces arrayed against the church, most

¹⁷ 1 Peter 2:4-5; 9-10.

significantly the Roman government, were winning. In order to demonstrate to John the ultimate victory of Christ over all the earthly enemies of the church, God gives John an extended vision of what is happening in heaven even as the earthly form of the church experiences ongoing violent persecution.

The kinds of worship which are normative in descriptions of the consummation of all things in John's Revelation are exclusively exuberant corporate expressions of worship.¹⁸ Even the cherubim are not alone in their praise of God but come together in community. It is the individual experiences of worship which should feed the communal practices and not the other way round as we often perceive it.

A Covenantal Understanding of Worship As It Relates to the Family

As mentioned in the first chapter God has designed the family as the foundational context within which faith is formed and nurtured. This stems from a covenantal understanding of God's people. While an individual's relationship with God is an important theme throughout scripture so too is the community of faith. Throughout both the older covenant and newer covenant God was not solely concerned with calling individuals to Himself but also called whole families and peoples. In our modern age we have so consistently sub-divided the generations in church life that the whole notion of having family worship or family devotionals may seem awkward and even strange. Yet the wisdom we glean from surveying the story of God's people teaches us that sharing our faith with our children is a natural process God has created. The awkwardness some

¹⁸ Rev 5:8.

parents may experience in leading their children in simple spiritual disciplines of prayer and scripture reading or other acts of worship is a sign of how deeply even many sincere, Christian families have been impacted by our secular culture.

Too often parents have abrogated their role as the primary agents of spiritual formation in their child's life and ceded it to the church (i.e. Sunday School & the youth group). In large measure the faith of the Church will be passed on to the next generation to the degree that fathers and mothers understand the vital and unique role of the family in the process of spiritual formation. The initial trial on family worship was designed to build toward developing a broader final thesis project which is that worship is the basis of all human transformation. Worship then is not just something we "do" on Sundays or during our "quiet time" but it embodies who we are and who we are becoming "in Christ."

In helping families develop a practice of daily worship the goal was not simply to help them "do a devotion" so that they can check it off their already overly crowded list of activities. But the goal is to help moms and dads to lead their children into the transforming presence of God. We were created to be in communion with our Creator and my hope is to help families regain that vision of our ultimate purpose. As the Westminster Catechism reminds us, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." Families are micro-communities and every community must be rooted in communion with God in order to be spiritually fruitful and to become the community which God desires it to be – one shaped by God's will.

Going back to the book of Genesis the Lord gives to man what many have called the “dominion mandate.” Here we see that mankind is commanded to be fruitful and multiply and exert God’s rule on God’s behalf. In Genesis 1:27-28 we read,

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.
God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth
and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every
living creature that moves on the ground.

To “be fruitful and increase in number” implies not simply a physical fruitfulness but a spiritual fruitfulness as well. This mandate comes before the fall and thus “the multiplying” would have most naturally included children who grew up knowing a deep communion with God. Adam and Eve were not to simply reproduce earthly creatures but creatures made in the image of God and created with the express purpose of living in communion with their Creator. Therefore, inculcating our faith into the hearts of our children is not just an additional responsibility given by God to parents; it is a part of the essence of parenthood itself. We aren’t to simply produce children but we are mandated to produce disciples who will commune with God as their Lord and Savior.

As God’s plan of salvation history unfolded and He began to create a unique people through whom the Savior would come, this task of passing on the faith to the next generation became critically important. This faith must endure through numerous generations so that the groundwork would be in place for the coming of Jesus as the Christ. In his great final message to the children of Israel before they enter into the Promised Land the Lord speaks through Moses and impresses upon them the importance

of forming the faith of the next generation. In Deuteronomy 11:18-21 Moses challenges the people and says:

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the LORD swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.

The necessity of passing on the faith to the next generation continues to be highlighted in the new covenant. The apostle Paul tells the Ephesians, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”¹⁹ Even though there remained a fervent hope that the Lord Jesus would return soon it was still regarded as vitally important that parents propagate their faith to their children. In many ways we have lost much of our sense of responsibility to the next generation.

In ages past there was much discussion even among political leaders about concern for our “posterity” – a word that we seldom hear anymore. Most parents don’t think about the generational impact that their decisions, their patterns of behavior and the attitudes which they model to their children will have on subsequent generations. Unfortunately, this extreme focus on self is so pervasive in our culture that even the fundamentally selfless task of parenting has been profoundly affected.

As parents make decisions in how they raise their children they should always consider the long-term consequences of the kind of values and behaviors which they are imprinting on their child. They should ask themselves, “How will this discipline help my

¹⁹ Eph 6:4.

child be shaped into a more loving spouse? How will this family tradition help my child be a better parent to their own children?" Think of the expanding influence a parent could exert down through the generations. Wouldn't it be a wonderful blessing if one's grandchildren or great-grandchildren were carrying out faith-forming traditions which were initiated by earlier generations?

In his great sermon on Pentecost the apostle Peter enunciates the covenant blessings which extend to our children. In Acts 2:38-39 Peter declares, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you *and your children* and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." Children of Christian parents have been blessed by God and through His sovereign will placed into the homes of believers so that they too can enjoy the spiritual benefits of being a part of the covenant community. Christian parenting is a process of shepherding souls whom God has already "set apart" in a significant way. We are given the privilege of raising princes and princesses in the Kingdom of God!

As the child grows into faith their trust in God is in turn a gift to their parents. We not only teach our children but they have much to teach us as well. Jesus held up children as models of humility. In general children have an acute awareness that they are utterly dependent on someone else for their well being. When looking for an example of greatness in the kingdom of heaven Jesus used a small child as his example. In Matthew 18:2-5 we read,

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children,

you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.”

In the midst of a culture that often under-valued children Jesus told his disciples that children were an important part of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”²⁰ In today’s world children are often under-valued in a different kind of way. In the predominant American culture children are often objectified and manipulated. They are seen mainly as objects of entertainment and not valued for what they can produce but valued rather for what they consume: fast food; video games; clothes or toys.

Christian parents are encouraged by Jesus to consider their children’s innate value in His Kingdom. They are not just the future of Christ’s kingdom but a genuine part of God’s Kingdom now. Covenant children don’t just possess the potential for faith but in many ways possess a faith that is purer and more genuinely trusting than that of adults. As I lead my own children in family worship I often find that they are in fact leading me. My children will often have an insight or clearness of understanding of a Bible story that for all my theological and biblical training eludes me. They are a gift of God in innumerable ways.

Conclusion

The scriptural call to worship God as the central aspect of a believer’s life is consistently clear. God has designed us to find our deepest satisfaction in Himself. That

²⁰ Matthew 19:14.

call is both an individual call and a corporate call that includes congregations of believers as well as families. Though selective for the purposes of this study, the scriptural material pertaining to worship is both broad and deep. In developing a theological framework for understanding “Everyday Worship” we are blessed with lots of biblical saints and spiritual mentors who have already done much of the heavy, theological work before us. In the next chapter we will seek to converse with other saints who have also longed to help the Body of Christ connect more deeply and intimately with God and with one another through a daily exercise of worship.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Worship is a very broad topic on which much has been written. Many of these books or articles are practically oriented and most often discuss the “nuts and bolts” of Sunday worship in a congregational setting. However, works which concern themselves with the centrality and value of worship in the daily life of believers or which deal with the theological foundations of such practice are far less numerous. For the purposes of this project I am examining practices of *daily* worship. Where daily worship is concerned the great majority of what is published falls in the category of “devotional” material. While often immensely helpful to individual Christians, most of these devotionals presuppose the importance of daily worship rather than make a case for its practice.

When one surveys what has been written about daily worship it becomes apparent that most writers or editors focus mainly on presenting inspiring content rather than delving into motivational or methodological concerns. The value of daily “devotions” for either the individual or the church as a whole is generally assumed rather than articulated in many devotional resources. By focusing on content they seem to be answering the question of “what” more than the questions of “how” or “why.” In this chapter we will consider how other critical, Christian thinkers have attempted to answer these latter questions.

There are a wide variety of both new and what could be termed “classic” daily devotionals available for the church’s use. As we think through the practice of daily worship we will survey those devotionals which seem to have stood the test of time and have proved inspirational to multiple generations. We will also interact with various writers who have reflected on the practice of worship in a general sense as well as those

who discuss more specific spiritual disciplines. In particular we will focus in on the spiritual discipline of scripture reading and scriptural meditation since that was the common “doorway” through which we invited our church members to enter into daily worship for the purposes of this project. Daily worship itself is a rather broad category and can consist of a whole range of activities including praying and fasting. But for the purposes of this project I am examining the particular spiritual discipline of scripture reading and scriptural meditation as a form of daily worship.

As I alluded to earlier most books on worship are concerned with the practice of corporate worship. This is not surprising considering the number of paid practitioners who are expected to plan, coordinate and prepare for corporate worship on a weekly basis. Other than the Church there are few organizations which have that same kind of weekly pressure to produce a publicly attended service which is expected to inspire, encourage, instruct and lead individuals into a deeper relationship with God. The pressure on pastors, worship leaders and choir directors is enormous to produce a “product” that is both beautiful and stirring.

During periods of history in which culture and language evolved relatively slowly resources such as the Anglican Church’s *Book of Common Prayer* rarely needed updating. But in the present day in which language and culture are changing at a rapid pace it seems as though pastors and worship leaders feel pressure to continually update both the language and modes of worship (i.e., video projection). Books which discuss the importance of corporate worship will continue to proliferate faster than those that discuss the centrality of daily worship as long as church leaders continue to struggle to adapt their practices of corporate worship to a constantly shifting cultural landscape.

A more cynical observer might note that it is corporate worship which in a sense “pays the bills” since most congregations raise the majority of their financial support during Sunday morning services. A call to “follow the money” may work not only for uncovering corruption in the secular worlds of business or government but in the church as well. Understandably most pastors will spend the majority of their time toward preparation for corporate worship rather than taking time to prepare resources which promote daily worship. While interesting, this line of thought leads us beyond the scope of this current project but could be a subject for later study.

When we examine the narrower field of daily worship it’s clear that a plethora of daily personal devotionals are available to individual believers. There are of course certain classic devotionals which have inspired generations of Christians. While sales figures are considered proprietary and hard to acquire it seems like there are a few devotionals that are generally considered “classics.”

Oswald Chambers’ *My Utmost for His Highest* has been widely used by saints for over a hundred years. Chambers recognizes and comments on the dangerous tendency of valuing “public service” for God more highly than the “private times of fellowship and oneness with Him.” Concerning the value of daily worship Chambers writes,

The measure of the worth of our public activity for God is the private profound communion we have with Him. Rush is wrong every time; there is always plenty of time to worship God. Quiet days with God may be a snare. We have to pitch our tents where we shall always have quiet times with God, however noisy our times with the world may be. There are not three stages in spiritual life—worship, waiting and work. Some of us go in jumps like spiritual frogs, we jump from worship to waiting, and from waiting to work. God’s idea is that the three should go together. They were always together in the life of Our Lord. He was unhesitating and unhesitating. It is a discipline, we cannot get into it all at once.¹

¹ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest, Classic Edition* (London: Discovery House Publishers), 5, Kindle.

Chambers also recognizes our human tendency to compartmentalize our lives. He uses the three terms of “worship, waiting and work” to describe the three levels of spiritual life. His image of leaping “like spiritual frogs” is a helpful, vivid image which if true during the classic era of Christendom of the 1920’s seems even more relevant today. There is something curiously attractive about a life of separate parts. Yet Chambers reminds his reader of the perfect example of Jesus as one who was able to join the disparate parts of daily life into an integrated whole. Recalling the example of Jesus in the pursuit of establishing a daily practice of worship is an important model to uphold as a foundation of this pursuit.

Like any discipline the habit of daily worship must be “practiced” which takes time and repetition. Chambers wisely counsels that this “is a discipline that must be developed; it will not happen overnight.” In a modern world not accustomed to deferring gratification it is important to remind Christians that establishing a consistent pattern of worship that is integrated into every aspect of life will not happen quickly. Just as learning to play a musical instrument requires consistent practice so a pattern of daily worship which is integrated into the day-to-day fabric of one’s life will take time to develop.

Yet there is a tension that must be addressed when speaking of spiritual disciplines. As with any habit of behavior there is a constant danger of a spiritual discipline becoming perfunctory or simply mechanical. And while this might be generally acceptable with “secular” disciplines such as practicing the piano, it poses a serious danger for the Christian. The goal of a secular discipline generally has a physically tangible goal (i.e., to become more skilled at playing a piece of music) whereas Christian

spiritual disciplines have an inherently relational goal. The whole point of daily worship is not just to become a better Bible scholar although that is a valuable ancillary benefit. Rather the main goal of daily worship is greater communion with God. This overarching goal of knowing God can never be lost or else the whole exercise loses any real, lasting spiritual value.

Chambers shares wisdom concerning the danger of doing something simply out habit even when that “something” is a spiritual discipline. He writes,

When we begin to form a habit we are conscious of it. There are times when we are conscious of becoming virtuous and patient and godly, but it is only a stage; if we stop there we shall get the strut of the spiritual prig. The right thing to do with habits is to lose them in the life of the Lord, until every habit is so practiced that there is no conscious habit at all. Our spiritual life continually resolves into introspection because there are some qualities we have not added as yet. Ultimately the relationship is to be a completely simple one. Your god may be your little Christian habit, the habit of prayer at stated times, or the habit of Bible reading. Watch how your Father will upset those times if you begin to worship your habit instead of what the habit symbolizes—“I can’t do that just now, I am praying; it is my hour with God.” No, it is your hour with your habit. There is a quality that is lacking in you. Recognize the defect, and then look for the opportunity of exercising yourself along the line of the quality to be added. Love means that there is no habit visible, you have come to the place where the habit is lost, and by practice you do the thing unconsciously. If you are consciously holy, there are certain things you imagine you cannot do, certain relationships in which you are far from simple; that means there is something to be added. The only supernatural life is the life the Lord Jesus lived, and He was at home with God anywhere. Is there anywhere where you are not at home with God? Let God press through in that particular circumstance until you gain Him, and life becomes the simple life of a child.²

It’s ironic, that for the Christian, spiritual maturity involves becoming more child-like in regards to faith, yet that is an image which Jesus refers to often.³ Without this relational attitude the practice of spiritual disciplines can easily become mechanical and even legalistic. So even as we encourage fellow believers to practice these disciplines the

² Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, 96.

³ cf. Mt 18:3; 19:14; Lk 18:17.

end goal of a deeper relationship with God must always be kept in view. Without this higher goal in mind all the Bible reading in the world may only serve to make the individual what Chambers aptly calls “a spiritual prig.”

Some Christians resist the notion of discipline in connection to daily worship. One woman from our church, an experienced and knowledgeable Bible study leader, gave an astute response to one survey question which asked, “How can we create more accountability with one another in our practice of daily worship?” She wrote,

To talk of developing accountability in our time with God is similar to talking of developing accountability for spending quality time together with a spouse. Not spending time with the one we supposedly are passionately in love with is a symptom of a much deeper relational problem. In my opinion, the solution lies in discovering the core relational issues needing attention, rather than building accountability in the act of spending time together – although possibly in some situations that may be a helpful exercise. Once the underlying relational issues are addressed and brought to a healing resolution, my belief is that logging quality time together will begin to flourish once again without assistance. Spending time together is the natural expression of loving hearts intent on enjoying one another. The same is true spiritually.

Devotional time becomes more consistent once we catch a vision for the joy, privilege, and dynamic adventure of developing and maintaining a personal relationship with God. Once we begin to see spending time with God similar to spending time with one we love, the entire practice moves from one of mostly discipline to one of mostly delight, wonder, and a fresh anticipation of “what’s next?” Once we began to see that we can get as close to God as we choose; that He delights in spending time with us and revealing His Treasures to our hearts; that He longs to strengthen us and help us change more into His image; and that He is excited about taking us on the adventure of a lifetime of fresh new vistas in Him....Once we realize those things - and so much more about the unfathomable depths that are ours in Him - *everything about spending time with Him has the possibility of being transformed!!*

This is just me, but honestly, I cringe at anything that tends to reduce time spent experiencing the wonder and delight of His Presence into anything that even remotely smacks of “duty” and “shoulds.” For me, the answer lies somewhere in the “taste and see” aspect of knowing and growing closer to God. Once His people get a real taste of experiencing the delightful reality of His Presence, I

really believe they will *run* to be with Him and lesser things will begin to fall away like chaff in the wind.⁴

There is much that she says that I commend and with which I agree. Her thoughts echo much of what Chambers said earlier about the inherent danger of our habits becoming an end unto themselves and in that sense a form of idolatry. And while there is a core of saints in the life of our church who would also resonate with this sentiment there is a large group of others for whom the “duty” of daily worship is the discipline which rekindles the fire of their love for God. In casual conversations with many members over the years I have heard numerous refer to the discipline of daily worship akin to going to the gym. Before going to work out many folks are not that motivated to go. Yet once they have gotten themselves there they are glad that they made the effort.

The pedagogical benefits of spiritual disciplines particularly for novices or new converts to the faith should not be forgotten. Novices of any discipline are easily discouraged and therefore need greater structure and accountability to sustain the practice of that discipline. Like any body of knowledge the exercise itself becomes a tutor for the novice. Classically trained musicians often learn to play by first playing through scales. Over time the formal structure and even what one might call the “rigidity” of playing the scales eventually allows greater freedom for the practitioner. The scales help the novice learn the mechanics of playing the instrument which hopefully leads to a deeper appreciation for and even a love of playing.

For a young musician, playing the scales is analogous to the young believer learning the discipline of daily worship. What begins as a somewhat “forced” behavior, over time becomes more natural as the novice gains the tools (language, posture, attitude,

⁴ Second Trial Survey response from September 6, 2011.

etc.) which aid them in connecting with God. What begins as a rigid discipline hopefully in time becomes a life-giving, loving relationship.

Like all relationships our knowledge and our connection with God starts at the level of acquiring knowledge or rudimentary information. For example, when I first met my wife before any real relationship could be established I had to first learn some basic facts: her name, her personal history and family origins, her present interests and pursuits and other simple data. This academic kind of learning was a necessary prerequisite before I could begin to establish any kind of meaningful relationship with her. When first establishing spiritual disciplines the emphasis has to remain on the fundamental characteristics of God: that God is knowable; that God has revealed Himself to us through His Word and through the Incarnation of Jesus as the unique Son of God; that God desires to speak to us through His Holy Spirit and that God intends that we express ourselves through prayer. Yet those fundamental facts are not just trivia but the very building blocks on which a relationship with God is established over time. These fundamental characteristics of God are not simply forgotten or discarded over time but form the foundation of an ever deepening relationship.

Parents in training their children in faith often begin by telling biblical stories which present examples of how others have interacted with God throughout salvation history. That information hopefully inspires emulation. Conveying facts about God and His interaction with humanity hopefully is one of the first steps a child takes in their “walk with God.”⁵ Our journey of faith must start at this basic level. It often begins with

⁵ cf. Gen 5:24.

the discipline of learning certain rudimentary facts or concepts but hopefully ends by developing into a loving, dynamic relationship.

This has implications for any attempt in the life of the church to establish new patterns of daily worship among its members. It is much more difficult to re-establish a practice that has been lost than to simply continue a practice which has been ingrained since childhood. The church cannot naively provide daily devotional materials and set them out in the church foyer with the vague hope that they will be used. The church must develop a culture which provides structure, encouragement, accountability and in a certain way incentives which promote daily worship most especially in the life of the novice.

In an ideal, less frenzied world we would perhaps have less need for the structure of prescribed, daily spiritual disciplines. Yet for many the frantic pace of daily life does little to foster a desire to set aside time for relating with God. We have become masters of “hiding” from our Creator as we’ve built on the example of Adam and Eve. Sadly we live in a cultural context where relationships are so undervalued that the divorce rate remains well over fifty percent. There are many spouses who would benefit greatly from a friend holding them accountable to spending quality time with their spouse. If there are those who need accountability in their tangible, marital relationships then surely there are those who need accountability in their spiritual relationship with God.

While Chambers’ warning about the danger of a habit becoming a type of idol is a helpful caution it does not mean that such habits are inherently problematic. Just as there is no inherent danger in the habit of brushing your teeth after meals there is no inherent

danger in a habit of daily Bible reading and prayer. The problem comes if that habit never grows toward its intended goal which is assumed to be greater intimacy with Christ.

Let us return to the analogy of a marriage relationship. A habitual, monthly “date night” with a spouse is often a helpful, structured method to allow the husband and wife to remove themselves temporarily from their daily role of parenting and other work. Hopefully, the “space” created by their dutiful date night will ultimately allow them the time and mental attention needed to deepen their connection and imbue their marriage with deeper meaning and affection. So too in our relationship with God sometimes structure and accountability are helpful ingredients which foster a more vibrant bond.

In his modern, classic *The Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster has reintroduced a whole generation of Christians to the traditional spiritual disciplines of the Christian faith. The very title juxtaposes two words which are rarely conceived of together. The term celebration often connotes spontaneity and merriment which typically have little connection to the notion of discipline. Discipline is often associated with order, regulation and restraint. Yet Foster puts these words together very intentionally in order to portray the joy to which a proper exercise of spiritual disciplines can lead. Rightly practiced these spiritual exercises are not killjoys but rather lead us into deeper joy.

Foster argues,

Neither should we think of the Spiritual Disciplines as some dull drudgery aimed at exterminating laughter from the face of the earth. Joy is the keynote of all the Disciplines. The purpose of the Disciplines is liberation from the stifling slavery to self-interest and fear. When the inner spirit is liberated from all that weighs it down, it can hardly be described as dull drudgery. Singing, dancing, even shouting characterize the Disciplines of the spiritual life.⁶

⁶ Richard J. Foster, *The Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 2, Kindle.

This insight helps us to remember to convey to our fellow Christians that the underlying motivation for living out these daily disciplines of worship is not to create spiritual killjoys whose aim is “exterminating laughter.” On the contrary our goal throughout this intentional and intense pursuit of God is ultimately “joy.” Too often in our attempts at motivating the church we forget to hold out the winsomeness of a discipline that leads to “singing, dancing, even shouting.”

Foster seeks to dispel the myth that the exercise of spiritual disciplines is simply for the cloistered, spiritual elite. He writes,

We must not be led to believe that the Disciplines are only for spiritual giants and hence beyond our reach, or only for contemplatives who devote all their time to prayer and meditation. Far from it. God intends the Disciplines of the spiritual life to be for ordinary human beings: people who have jobs, who care for children, who wash dishes and mow lawns. In fact, the Disciplines are best exercised in the midst of our relationships with our husband or wife, our brothers and sisters, our friends and neighbors.⁷

The idea that spiritual disciplines can only be practiced by the super-spiritual or those who shut themselves off from the busyness of everyday life seems to be one of the main obstacles to fostering their wider adoption among a majority of Christians. As long as one’s Christian faith remains just one compartmentalized segment of a multi-segmented life than even the consistent practice of spiritual disciplines will have little if any impact on the believer’s life as a whole.

Our technologically driven culture makes contemplative prayer and meditation seem more otherworldly than it did even twenty years ago. The wide proliferation of smart phones has made a vast array of personal, individualized entertainment options almost instantly available. The “downtime” a person might have had in years past as they rode the bus to school or began their commute on the train or bus to work is now often

⁷ Foster, *The Celebration of Discipline*, 1.

filled with “snap-chatting” with friends or checking email or sports’ scores. Some attempts have been made to use the technological tools at our disposal to foster spiritual growth. Though not a part of this project our church has provided email based devotionals in various “trial runs.” Some folks have found such digital formats helpful and more easily accessible than traditional formats. The church must be willing to experiment using various formats of devotional materials through a process of trial and error as we move into an increasingly digitized age.

Some classic devotionals such as Scripture Union’s classic *Daily Light on the Daily Path* simply string together direct quotes from scripture without adding any other commentary. Some believers really appreciate the purity of these kinds of devotionals. Anne Graham Lots noted in the preface of a revised edition that her grandmother gave it to her mother, Ruth Bell Graham when she was a young child living in China on the mission field. Anne in turn received a copy from her mother when she was ten years old and has also given copies of it to all of her children over the years.⁸ The devotionals which seem to have truly stood the test of time are ones which adhere most closely scripture and reflect most directly on God’s Word.

In Harold Best’s *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts*, he makes the helpful assertion that our practice of worship is not something we have to manufacture but part of what it means to be human. Best argues that we human beings are creatures who, by our very nature, “pour forth.” Best writes,

The thousand faces of worship contain both deadened and lively countenances. They are the lost and the found, all of whom are continuous worshipers, for as the title of this chapter states, nobody does not worship. We begin with one fundamental fact about worship: at this very moment, and for as long as this world endures, everybody inhabiting it is bowing down and serving something or

⁸ Anne Graham Lotz, *Daily Light Devotional* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), vii.

someone-an artifact, a person, an institution, an idea, a spirit, or God through Christ. Everyone is being shaped thereby and is growing up toward some measure of fullness, whether of righteousness or of evil. No one is exempt and no one can wish to be. We are, every one of us, unceasing worshipers and will remain so forever, for eternity is an infinite extrapolation of one of two conditions: surrender to the sinfulness of sin unto infinite loss or the commitment of personal righteousness unto infinite gain. This is the central fact of our existence, and it drives every other fact. Within it lies the story of creation, fall, redemption and new creation or final loss.⁹

When worship is understood in this way it changes how we approach promoting daily worship in the life of church members. Worship is not something foreign to what people do all the time. In a sense we are always worshiping. So the issue is not how do we motivate folks to worship but rather how do we motivate them to worship the one true God. It is a matter of turning their affections away from worldly things and aiming them toward God. With such an understanding of the nature of worship it makes promoting daily worship a much less onerous task. It's not that daily worship is not happening but rather that it's not happening correctly.

Best also provides a definition of worship that informs our discussion of daily worship as well. He writes, "Worship is the continuous outpouring of all that I am, all that I do and all that I can ever become in light of a chosen or choosing god."¹⁰ This broader definition of worship opens up any view which would attempt to narrow the scope of this fundamental, human exercise. "Continuous outpouring" could be expressed through almost any human activity including: artistic expression through the visual arts, dancing, singing, or playing an instrument. Those broad parameters also imply that worship could take forms far afield from what might be called stereo-typical "spiritual"

⁹ Harold M. Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 131, Kindle.

¹⁰ Best, *Unceasing Worship*, 138.

behavior. The critical aspect of worship from a biblical point of view is not its form or expression but rather its object. If God is the object then any passionate form of self-expression done for God's glory could be defined as worship.

This has significant implications for the kinds of activities which we should encourage saints to engage in and explore as possible expressions of worship. While this takes us beyond the scope of this particular study this kind of freedom will undoubtedly be liberating to many. It will be especially helpful to those who perhaps feel constrained by more traditional spiritual disciplines. The idea is supported by Paul's exhortation to the Colossians, "*And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*"¹¹ To be done "in the name of the Lord" means under Christ's authority and for His glory. With that kind of attitude, in a sense, everything we do becomes an act of worship. This also is congruent with Paul's call to the Thessalonians to "pray without ceasing" as discussed in the previous chapter.¹²

A similar concept is developed in Brother Lawrence's classic, *The Practice of the Presence of God*. Brother Lawrence famously postulates that he could wash dishes in a noisy kitchen as an act of devotion to God. He writes, "The time of work," he said, "is not different for me than the time of prayer. In the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several people are calling out at the same time for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament."¹³

¹¹ Col 3:17.

¹² 1 Thes 5:17

¹³ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God: In Modern English*, trans. Marshall Davis (n.p., 2013), 253-255, Kindle.

Practicing the presence of God in the midst of everyday activities is a brilliant and transformative insight which has helped the church greatly since it was first written in the late seventeenth century where Brother Lawrence lived in relative obscurity as a monk in a Carmelite monastery in Paris. It's not surprising that many protestants have resonated with Brother Lawrence's ideas because at the heart of this concept is the affirmation of the "priesthood of all believers."¹⁴ It affirms the intrinsic value of all work done with a mind and heart open to God's presence. It was this same insight which contributed to the "protestant work ethic." Over the centuries some in the church began to argue for a hierarchy of value for particular work. In this framework "church vocations" such as that of priest was seen to have greater intrinsic value. Through the writings of many of the reformers such as Martin Luther and with accompanying voices such as Brother Lawrence from within the Roman church many began to reject this hierarchical understanding of vocation.

Brother Lawrence argues that many believers have truncated spiritual lives because they become stuck on certain spiritual practices. He writes, "Many people do not advance in the Christian life, because they get stuck in penances and particular spiritual exercises. They neglect the love of God, which is the goal. This could be seen plainly by their works, and was the reason why we see so little solid virtue."¹⁵

This does however create a certain tension within one's pursuit of a life in the Spirit. When everything done with an openness to God's presence becomes worship, then the need for the "forms" of set aside times of prayer diminishes. Brother Lawrence speaks quite openly and directly to this when he writes,

¹⁴ 1 Peter 2:9

¹⁵ Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, 184-185.

I have stopped practicing all forms of devotion and set prayers, except those which I am obliged to participate in. I make it my practice only to persevere in His holy presence. I do this simply by paying attention to, and directing my affection to, God. I call this the actual presence of God. It is a habitual, silent, and secret communion of the soul with God. This often causes such joys and raptures inwardly, and sometimes also outwardly, that I am forced to make an effort to moderate them to prevent their appearance to others.¹⁶

It is a beautiful thing to hear the testimony of a saint who has advanced so far in his spiritual life that the stricter forms of what he refers to as “devotion and set prayers” for the most part are an unnecessary encumbrance. Much like training wheels only serve to slow down the experienced bicyclist so in Brother Lawrence’s case “set prayers” only served to diminish rather than enhance his communion with God. While this is a wonderful position to which all followers of Christ should aspire, realistically not many of us will ever attain that level of spiritual maturity or complete integration of what one might call the sacred and secular aspects of life. We must keep in mind that the context of Brother Lawrence’s daily life of living in a cloistered community of like-minded believers is quite unique. We should be careful not to apply his wisdom or customs in overly simplistic ways but in ways which can be adapted to modern, un-cloistered contexts.

In most churches there are probably several mature saints for whom I suspect Brother Lawrence’s teaching would resonate deeply. But we must be careful to remember that the practice of the spiritual disciplines is not a “one-size-fits-all” endeavor. Just as various disciplines appeal to different types of people based on a whole range of factors including temperament, experience and available training so the rigor with which those disciplines are applied to each individual is going to vary widely based on their own spiritual maturity. A novice may need the discipline of reading entire chapters of

¹⁶ Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, 310-314.

scripture or even longer passages at a set time, in a predetermined place, on a daily basis in order to create the space and time needed to foster a more personal and intimate relationship with God. A more mature believer may require much less structure and need only to meditate on one verse or even a phrase or single word in order to produce an equally meaningful sense of communion with God.

An illustration of this kind of freedom from set forms and which develops over time can be seen in music. A new student to an instrument is strictly bound to the written notes while a more experienced player, demonstrated in forms such as Jazz, can take greater liberties with extemporaneous expressions. An instrumentalist who has honed his craft through years of practice and self-discipline can deviate more freely from the very forms which helped them achieve that level of expertise. When a less experienced player prematurely jettisons the self-discipline and strict form of the written notes their attempts at playing may quickly devolve into a cacophony of noise rather than a coherent form of music. Disciplines such as the playing of scales and strictly adhering to the written notes help to tutor the developing musician much like reading the Psalms or reciting the Lord's Prayer can help guide a young Christian on how they should pray.

Jesus experienced tension and even open conflict over the issue of form versus freedom in his debates with the Pharisees. For instance the Pharisees wanted to maintain a very strict observance of Sabbath-keeping. Jesus had a deeper understanding of the spirit of the law which was designed to foster a humble openness to God's presence. This more mature understanding gave him a greater sense of freedom in His observance of the

Sabbath. He told the Pharisees, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”¹⁷

As Mark Buchanan argues in his book *The Rest of God*, freedom and worship are closely linked throughout the biblical narrative. He writes,

In some ways, the whole point of the Exodus was Sabbath. Let my people go, became God’s rallying cry, that they might worship me. At the heart of liberty—of being let go—is worship. But at the heart of worship is rest—a stopping from all work, all worry, all scheming, all fleeing—to stand amazed and thankful before God and his work. There can be no real worship without true rest.¹⁸

The practice of worship and resting in God’s presence leads to even greater freedom. This freedom encourages a worshipful attitude which can invade every aspect of daily life. The unexpected joy of Sabbath-keeping is that it does not involve “doing something more” but rather inviting God into what you are already doing. Buchanan continues,

The one who is most free is the one who turns the work of his hands into sacrament, into offering. All he makes and all he does are gifts from God, through God, and to God. Just as simple bread and juice, when we eat and drink them in a spirit of thanksgiving and faith, become the very presence of Christ, so simple tasks—preparing sermons, cooking soup, cutting grass, growing corn—when done in the same spirit, are holy. It is all the Lord’s work. Virtually any job, no matter how grueling or tedious—any job that is not criminal or sinful—can be a gift from God, through God, and to God.¹⁹

Too often in the life of the church a daily discipline of worship is seen as a constraining duty based on law rather than a freedom-giving exercise based on grace. Worship is a call to rest in God’s presence and not simply engage in another form of

¹⁷ Mark 2:27.

¹⁸ Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 94, Kindle.

¹⁹ Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 24-25.

human activity. In our consumer driven culture worship can easily become warped into yet another product for our consumption. Buchanan comments,

We have let consumerism tutor the church in its creed of more, better, brighter, faster. So we have fostered expectations that no church, no home group, no pulpit, no band of brothers, no brand of worship, no conference, no Bible school can ever deliver. The shortfall between what we dream and what we get is vast. All is weighed and found wanting in our sight. Only we set our sights on the wrong horizon.²⁰

This same pursuit of freedom in God's presence should be applied to other spiritual disciplines as well. We should not feel chained or trapped by certain forms of prayer or techniques of scripture reading or meditation but rather be open to an adaptation of traditional practices so as to make the discipline serve the particular needs of practitioner rather than the other way around.

The church's leadership must learn to present a balanced approach to the practice of worship. The church's members should be encouraged to experiment with various spiritual disciplines and to carry them out in varying degrees of strictness to form depending on the individual's spiritual maturity and other contextual factors. The spiritual disciplines of daily worship should be presented as having helpful, time-tested forms as well as a certain freedom in the personal expression of those forms.

Brother Lawrence's daily life within the walls of a monastery exhibited a more communal and cloistered experience than is typical in the modern church. This makes applying Lawrence's wisdom within a more representative church setting a significant challenge. Lawrence's example primarily benefits today's Christian by the freedom it illustrates. Communion with God does not necessarily have to take place in a quiet,

²⁰ Buchanan, *The Rest of God*, 214.

cloistered corner of a church but can happen even in the midst of a busy kitchen or hectic office space.

The simple but significant encouragement one gains from living in a Christian community like Brother Lawrence enjoyed should never be underestimated. Having lived in several different communal Christian settings over the years, I can speak firsthand of its power to subtly support deeper fellowship with God. Seeing fellow believers for one hour one day a week is a poor substitute for the kind of fellowship and encouragement that comes from living in community. Unfortunately, there is no quick or easy fix for this lack of community in the modern church. Leaders must encourage greater interaction, mutual support and fellowship by all possible means. The church has tried to address this need through the development of small groups as well as teams of people joined for particular ministry or mission tasks. What kind of positive affect this has had on the practice of daily worship is hard to gauge but would make for a good follow-up study. While a large percentage of churches do have some kind of small group ministry, mid-week services or weekly prayer gatherings the notion of meeting daily for prayer seems an impractical goal for many.

In order to contextualize this notion of daily worship into our culture one must apply spiritual practices often described in scripture as lived out in communal context to our more individualistic age. We no longer live in a primarily agrarian society in which several generations cohabitate. We live in an age when people often spend more time alone in their car commuting to work than they do talking intimately with a friend or even a spouse. The particular nature of Brother Lawrence's daily work also has bearing on how readily applicable his teaching is to a modern setting. Some manual tasks such as

washing dishes does not require the mental concentration of other more technical or mentally challenging vocations. Listening to scripture or a devotional of some kind during one's daily commute might be one possible way of adjusting ancient practices to fit a more modern context.

While beyond the scope of this particular project more thought needs to be given as to how we help create community through spiritual practices even as the church lives more disparate lives. While it is impractical to think the church as a whole could directly emulate the early disciples' practice of meeting daily perhaps fostering "mini-communities" of even two or three believers could help cultivate greater consistency in daily worship. For instance, I am aware of a small, ecumenical group of believers who work in the same office at a local business and who meet weekly over lunch for prayer. This kind of de-centralized community building needs to happen more frequently in the life of the church.

Promoting daily worship is a complex task because everyone lives out their daily lives in such varied contexts. What works for a father who wakes up at four in the morning to go to work "on the line" at a local factory may not work well for a young mom who works out of her home. What appeals to a tech-savvy teen or twenty-something may not appeal to a retiree. What works well for a single widow may not be practical for a young family with small children. As we move next to chapter four we will see how the various stages of the project sought to engage believers with sensitivity to their particular daily context.

CHAPTER FOUR: PROJECT DESIGN

As discussed in the previous chapters the practice of daily worship has become a foreign concept to many believers. Any attempt to reintroduce this practice must take into account the pitfalls of initiating any new behavior or activity into an already busy, over-filled schedule. In designing a project that would encourage the practice of daily worship among the members of the Royal Oak Presbyterian Church it first had to be decided which of the spiritual disciplines would be most appropriate.

Some of the attraction of using the term “daily worship” is that it can include a broad range of spiritual disciplines yet is still descriptive of its purpose. Many terms have been used over the years to describe a time of spiritual contemplation. Monastic orders often spoke of “Praying the Hours” or the “Three-fold Daily Prayers.” These titles are somewhat of a misnomer as these services almost always included the reading or singing of scripture to some extent. The Anglican Church’s Book of Common Prayer gives form and guidance for “morning and evening prayers” which also include scripture. More recently Evangelicals have used terms such as daily devotionals, quiet time or time alone with God as descriptors of time set apart for spiritual reflection and the worship of God.

The term “daily worship” required some initial defining. The phrase conjured in some people’s mind an elaborately orchestrated “mini” church service – complete with music and an intricate order of service. Once it was explained as a time centered on the worship of God through the discipline of daily scripture reading and meditation with an adjoining time of prayer it was generally understood.

Though there are a myriad of disciplines which one could incorporate into an exercise of daily worship, I chose to focus on scripture reading as the foundation. Though all the spiritual disciplines can draw one into greater communion with God it could be argued that reading the Bible is the most foundational. Holy Scripture is the vehicle through which God chose to give humanity His “special revelation” as contrasted with the “general revelation” of creation. As Paul instructed Timothy, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”¹

Bible reading is perhaps the most concrete and accessible of all the disciplines. While in past generations reading was an exercise of the educated elite, in today’s world reading is ubiquitous. Though not everyone loves to read it is an ability that is practically universal within a North American context. A daily practice of reading Bible passages inherently provides form and content to this time of worship.

In structuring these devotional resources it was helpful to consult some of the wisdom of those who have written and reflected deeply on spiritual disciplines. The very first chapter in Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline* which was reviewed in the previous chapter discusses scriptural meditation. Foster writes, “Christian meditation, very simply, is the ability to hear God’s voice and obey his word. It is that simple.”² Foster begins his thorough discussion of spiritual disciplines with scriptural meditation as its beginning point and foundation.

¹ 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

² Richard J. Foster, *The Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 17, Kindle.

John Piper quotes Jonathan Edwards in discussing the centrality of scripture for promoting religious devotion, “Edwards once preached a sermon entitled *The Importance and Advantage of a thorough Knowledge of Divine Truth*. In it he said, ‘Be assiduous in reading the Holy Scriptures. This is the fountain whence all knowledge in divinity must be derived. Therefore let not this treasure lie by you neglected’ (*Works*, II, 162).”³

While prayer is often considered the most ubiquitous of all the spiritual disciplines, it must be remembered that there is nothing inherently “Christian” about prayer. Prayer is practiced by those who ascribe to a wide variety of belief systems. And so while it is always appropriate to encourage believers to pray, it is important to root those prayers as a response to how God has revealed Himself to us in His Word. God speaks to us in many ways: through the general revelation of nature; through the inner leading of the Holy Spirit; but the clearest enunciation of His Voice can be heard in the Bible.

One of the goals of any discipline is to do it so often and that it becomes nearly organic such that it doesn’t really “feel” like discipline; no more so than getting a drink of water feels like discipline when you are thirsty. There should be a certain self-forgetfulness about the form of worship so that its purpose remains rooted in building a relationship with God. As CS Lewis remarked in *Letters to Malcolm*, “The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on

³ John Piper, “The Pastor as Theologian: Life and Ministry of Jonathan Edwards, 1988 Bethlehem Conference for Pastors,” Desiring God Foundation, last modified April 15, 1988, accessed September 4, 2015, <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-pastor-as-theologian>.

God.”⁴ That same kind of “unawareness” of form should be a goal for daily worship as well. When the format of the devotional material is as simple in design as possible it allows the worshiper to concentrate more appropriately on God’s presence and listening for His “still, small voice.”⁵ This argues for a devotional resource that is simple and user-friendly in terms of organization and layout. For the uninitiated this was as simple as introducing them to the practice of pausing to read and give thanks before a family meal or reading and praying with their spouse or children just before bed. These practices were introduced not as a duty but rather as a privilege and a joy.

Over the course of the project three different trials were run using various materials and targeting different groups within the church. The first trial targeted families with children in the home. The second and third trials targeted individuals using different techniques. The third trial greatly benefitted from lessons learned in the earlier trials. While not originally intending to carry out three trials, in the end it was this “trial and error” methodology (pardon the pun) which allowed for much more positive outcomes in the third trial.

First Trial: Family Devotionals

As discussed briefly in chapter one a series of family devotions was developed and distributed to ten different families within the congregation to help them establish a pattern of family worship. Since daily worship was a new concept to many of the parents themselves the curriculum was designed to be simple enough to be used without much

⁴ CS Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002), 4, Kindle.

⁵ 1 Kings 19:12.

preparation and flexible enough to be used by families with children of various ages up to twelve years old.

Some of the feedback from the families involved in an earlier project indicated that informal settings can often provide the most conducive contexts for faith formation. The “in-between” times often involve less formal but nonetheless intentional “faith forming” activities such as scripture memorization over breakfast; prayers at meals; prayers and confessions of faith at bedtime (using the Lord’s Prayer or Apostles’ Creed). Therefore I attempted to provide a devotional resource which was simple, short, flexible, practical and realistic.

The ten families which participated in this trial represented the vast majority of the “younger families” within the life of the church. (The membership is 175 adults and the average Sunday morning worship generally ranges between eighty-five to around one hundred participants.) It was encouraging to get such a high participation rate. This was accomplished mainly through personal invitation either over the phone or face-to-face.

As mentioned in chapter one each family was given a copy of the four week, twelve lesson curriculum (see appendix A). Each family was also given a children’s Bible entitled, *The Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally Lloyd-Jones on which the study guide with discussion questions and suggested activities was based.⁶

Ms. Lloyd-Jones children’s Bible is a real gift to the church. I have read and personally used many different children’s Bibles with my own children and given many

⁶ Sally Lloyd-Jones, *The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zonderkidz, 2007).

to children and young families over the years. This is one of the best I have come across. It does a wonderful job of helping children and families understand the overarching story of the Gospel. It helps connect the dots between the older covenant and new covenant. The only weakness of this Bible is the limited number of stories. There are forty-four stories in total which includes many of the most central accounts yet much of the biblical witness is obviously not included. In contrast David C. Cook Publishing's popular *The Picture Bible* has two hundred and thirty-three stories contained in it which is almost five times as many. Using these in tandem would be an alternative approach. One would hope that over time Ms. Jones might continue to add other important but perhaps lesser known stories of the Bible to this wonderful collection.

The illustrations within every children's Bible are usually geared toward a certain age group. Because the majority of the young families in the church had children on the younger end of the spectrum a Bible whose illustrations would appeal to this younger audience was chosen. *The Picture Bible* may be more appropriate for older children (ages 8-12) as the art work appears more realistic and perhaps less fanciful in style. As the children grow and mature the Bible of choice may need to change in order to match their maturity level. By the time most of the children in the home are over twelve years old it would be wise to transition to what is often referred to as a "reader's version" or "teen version" of the Bible. Many standard adult translations also have a "reader's" version which seeks to simplify the language and make it more readable for younger readers and these could be used during a transitional phase.

The family devotional resources were distributed, including a personalized "Jesus Story Book Bible" as a gift to the families. All the families seemed very grateful for the

Bible and the curriculum and were excited to try something new. No particular start or end date was set which in retrospect was a mistake. The lack of a prescribed start date did allow for more flexibility but it also had some unforeseen negative effects. First of all it allowed for procrastination. One family shared, “We were always so busy that it never seemed like there was a good time to start.”⁷ Secondly, the lack of a specific start date took away any sense of mutual encouragement or accountability which can be gained by participating with other young families within a similar time frame. Another factor that limited the sense of mutual accountability was the fact that this initial trial only included young families and so there was no church-wide structure (such as tying the devotionals to the sermon texts) to help keep participants on task. There was also no attempt to gather these families together for mutual support which could have encouraged families to stay engaged. That kind of mutual encouragement proved to be a major contributor to the success of the two later trials.

Even though personal contact was maintained with most of these families throughout the course of the next couple of months there was no particular mechanism of accountability in place. The parents were simply invited to make contact with the Pastor if they had any particular questions. After about eight weeks an email was sent saying that it was hoped that their experience of family devotionals was going well and that feed-back forms would be sent out soon.

After about ten weeks a letter was sent on December 3, 2010 thanking families for their participation and asked them to send in their responses to both the “Initial Family Questionnaire” and the “Follow-Up Questionnaire.” New copies of each form were

⁷ From First Trial Survey dated December 15, 2010.

included in case they had been misplaced along with a pre-addressed, stamped envelope. They were asked to return the feedback forms within three weeks. Over the next several weeks the returns started to come in and ultimately responses from seven of the ten families were received.

Family Devotional Outcomes

In general the outcomes of this project to promote family worship were positive. The trial helped to begin a conversation about the important role moms and dads play as the primary shepherds of their children's souls. There was much valuable feed-back from both the "Initial Family Questionnaire" and from the "Follow-up Questionnaire." A full listing of these results can be found in Appendix A. Seven of the ten feed-back forms were collected at the conclusion of the project which equates to a good rate of return of seventy percent.

For many of the participants this project represented their first attempt at "family devotions." For some it had been a sporadic practice and for others it was a well established part of their families' culture. The underlying hope was not just to change behavior but to change the culture of the family.

Looking at the overall results it's interesting but not surprising that two-thirds of the parents polled did not grow up with family devotions or worship. That's encouraging in the sense that the project introduced these folks to a practice that they had never had on their radar before. But that lack of precedent also makes it challenging to establish family devotions as a part of that particular family's culture in the long term. Some parents

obviously made this task a higher priority than others. As mentioned earlier there were three couples who never returned the feedback forms. Generally though the overall tone of the responses received was positive and encouraging.

It was difficult to decide on the number of devotions to assign each week. The curriculum provided for three devotions per week which seemed to be a realistic goal for most families. Several families only did one or two devotions per week. Only one family, who had already established a pattern of daily family worship, expressed a desire for additional devotional material to be used on a nightly basis. One set of parents was obviously frustrated with the assignment due to the young ages of their children. A more definitive age range such as “five to twelve years old” could have avoided this frustration. Most children’s Bibles include a suggested age range.

Several participants mentioned that they enjoyed *The Jesus Storybook Bible*. Four of the seven families indicated that they would like to use a simple curriculum like the one provided. Three of the families noted that they would prefer to read from the children’s Bible and as one put it “see what thoughts or questions the kids have and go from there.”⁸ The increase in the number of children’s Bibles also is a great resource for parents. For those parents who indicated that they would prefer to simply use a children’s Bible, perhaps one service the church could perform is provide reviews of different Bibles and samples to borrow from the church’s library.

Knowing the families who said they would prefer to simply read from a children’s Bible helps to understand their stated preference. One family whose child was only three

⁸ From First Trial Survey dated December 15, 2010.

and a half was really too young for the devotional material. These parents should have simply been encouraged to read the stories and not concern themselves with the curriculum. The other two families are led by spiritually mature parents who probably feel very comfortable just reading the stories and spontaneously coming up with questions for their children to discuss. The more biblically rooted the parent the more freedom they probably feel in going in whatever direction the Spirit or their children lead. Those parents newer to faith or with less support liked having the curriculum as a resource.

The devotional curriculum was used on average six times over the course of the month, which is less than two per week. By that measure participants only completed half the number of devotions out of a goal of four per week. However, there were a lot of contributing factors to that relatively low rate of completion. Six of the seven families who returned surveys were not engaged in family devotions when they were invited to participate in this project. In four of the seven families neither parent had any personal experience with family worship in their family of origin. For inexperienced parents even initiating one devotion per week may have been a daunting challenge. The project was successful in initiating a conversation about family worship and the central role parents are to play in their children's spiritual formation. That is an important conversation and one that should continue in the future.

Several aspects of this trial could be improved. Perhaps the most obvious area for improvement would be designing a program which fosters a greater sense of community among fellow parents. Simply providing curriculum without other support structures

makes implementation more difficult. Further summary and reflection along with possible improvements to future trials will be included in the final chapter.

Second Trial: Individual Devotions

The second trial was also discussed in chapter one and involved a church-wide invitation to eight weeks of devotional practice, beginning May 15, 2011. Ultimately about twenty-five folks committed to this daily discipline. In contrast to the devotionals which were developed for families these devotionals were designed to follow a particular schedule on the calendar. A sermon series on the book of Acts was planned and served as a common touch-point for the devotionals. The scripture readings and questions for reflection were selected as preparation for and reflection on the various sermon texts.

While the devotional resources developed for families in the first trial were more detailed and prescribed, for the second trial the description of “daily worship” was intentionally kept simple. Participants were given a relatively short scripture reading with an encouragement to pray before or after the reading. While designed primarily for individuals it was also communicated that the participants were free to practice daily worship in whatever context was most meaningful for them whether as individuals, among friends, as married couples or with their entire families.

The sermon schedule and associated texts were announced in the church’s newsletter. Then over the course of eight weeks the daily readings and reflection questions for each text were included in the weekly bulletin. The passages and reflection

questions were also emailed to each member of the trial group in case Sunday worship was missed or the reading schedule in the bulletin was misplaced.

The first two days (Monday & Tuesday) of readings and reflection questions looked back at the sermon & scripture texts from the previous Sunday as a way of promoting further reflection and integration of the message into the workweek. The readings and questions for Wednesday through Saturday were ones which related to the sermon texts for the upcoming Sunday. One of the failings of this particular organization of texts was that it did not always include the reading of the sermon text until Sunday morning itself. In retrospect it would have been more effective to include the sermon text as one of the earlier readings. The original assumption was that the participants would read the sermon text on the Sunday morning on which that text would be used as the basis for the sermon. It would have strengthened the exercise to have the particular sermon text scheduled earlier in the week so that they would have adequate time to read and reflect on it prior to Sunday morning.

Another aspect that was missing in this trial but which seemed effective in the third trial was the connection with both the Sunday morning sermon and the Wednesday night Bible Study. The third trial which will be discussed more in depth in the next section fostered a sense of having a church-wide conversation which was missing in this second trial.

When only twenty-five members out of upwards of one hundred worshipers on an average Sunday morning are reading the texts together, it makes it difficult to feel confident that everyone is on the same page. Getting a larger percentage of the church to

“buy-in” to any given daily worship schedule seems to multiply the impact of mutual accountability and encouragement. The small number of participants in this trial almost served to reinforce the stereotypical view that daily worship was only for the “spiritual elites.” Perhaps every church-wide invitation should have a pre-determined threshold of participation which if not met indicates that the incentives of that program were not adequate or the particulars of the study not compelling enough to generate a “critical mass” of enthusiasm. This could perhaps be addressed by some form of “pre-polling” or “test-marketing.” In retrospect starting the second trial toward the beginning of the summer vacation season seems like a glaring mistake and most likely contributed to the poor participation rate.

At the conclusion of the eight weeks a survey was sent to all those who had participated (See Appendix B). Unfortunately, the rate of return on this initial survey was very poor. Only five surveys were received back from the twenty-five sent out for a return rate of only twenty percent. However, the ones which were returned were very thorough and of a high quality and offered a lot of helpful feedback.

When asked, “What were the most helpful or useful aspects of the daily readings?” One responder wrote,

They served as another tool to help me connect with God’s Heart in an authentic way. Most of all, they enhanced my Sunday morning worship connection with the ROPC body, as I felt I had journeyed with the fellow participants throughout the week. I also experienced a heightened sense of connection with the Sunday morning message, as I felt my heart had been prepared more to receive whatever Alan was sharing that particular week.⁹

⁹ From Second Trial Survey dated September 6, 2011.

There are two positive themes in this response which were common throughout both Trial Two and Trial Three. The first frequent theme was the sense of community which the prescribed readings engendered. The second theme which was noted in this second trial, and to a much wider degree in the third trial, was a deeper connection and engagement with the sermon.

The commitment to read the passages together as a community helped the congregation feel connected to one another throughout the week as they “journeyed with the fellow participants.” This connection seemed to serve as both an encouragement and a mild kind of accountability. It is something akin to belonging to a book club and the anxiety one would feel attending a gathering having not read the book. This subtle peer pressure might be considered a passive form of accountability. There is no one who necessarily is going to ask about the previous week’s readings but there is always that chance. Of course if peer pressure became too great or the expectations became too high this could have the opposite effect. One could imagine some participants skipping worship for fear of not being prepared. Nothing in the survey results hinted at this as a problem but it might be helpful in future studies to track the worship attendance of the participants and observe more closely whether it increased or decreased over the course of the trial.

As noted earlier the second theme that emerged from this second trial was a deeper connection between the daily readings and the Sunday sermons. One person remarked, “This exercise provided something to look forward to, to keep up with, to tie scripture into the previous and upcoming worship service.”¹⁰ This was an exciting

¹⁰ From Second Trial Survey dated October 6, 2011.

connection to see develop because one of the overarching goals of the project was to help bridge the gap between the disciple's "Sunday morning faith" and the "Monday morning world." These daily readings helped tie together what is often a disjointed journey of faith for many.

Though the survey was high in the quality of responses it could not fully compensate for the small number of feedback forms returned (five, representing twenty-percent of those who initially signed-up for the exercise). As mentioned earlier this low rate of return was discouraging to say the least. It called into question how widely the readings had been utilized. Some of the difficulty in obtaining feed-back may be related to the make-up of the survey tool itself. There were several missteps in this area.¹¹

To begin with the survey was overly long. There were thirteen questions and it was two pages long. The types of questions were predominantly short answer type questions which required the participants to spend several minutes per question so that the entire questionnaire could have easily taken thirty minutes. Some of the lengthier responses probably took upwards of an hour to compose. This format produced some good qualitative data approaching the quality of feedback one would expect in a directed interview.

Another mistake was not including a self-addressed, stamped envelope with the feedback form. It seems like a small detail but the rate of return jumped significantly in the third trial using just such a technique. The second trial, while not wholly successful,

¹¹ It must be admitted that many of the concepts that research expert Dr. Bryan Auday has articulated were not followed very closely but these mistakes were corrected for the third trial. Dr. Auday is a Professor of Psychology at Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts and also serves as a guest lecturer at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary on research methodologies.

provided some very valuable lessons that forced reexamination of the project. A severe course correction was needed in order to salvage the overall goal of promoting daily worship.

Third Trial Method: Essential One Hundred Readings

For the third trial a different approach was developed. The low participation rate seemed to be the key hurdle to overcome. Great efforts were made in searching for a daily reading plan that would be more appealing and less intimidating to a larger proportion of the congregation. Breaking away from the notion that an exercise of daily worship was for a select few was critical.

As described to some degree back in chapter one the “Essential One Hundred” (E100) scripture reading challenge produced by the non-denominational, Christian ministry “Scripture Union,” addressed many of the weaknesses of the earlier trial.¹² First of all it was easily explainable and therefore seemed to appeal to more than just those who were already practicing daily worship but to many neophytes as well. At the risk of sounding crass, it is safe to say that the E100 program was more “marketable.”

The E100 reading program is designed to give an overview of the whole of scripture from Genesis to Revelation. It takes fifty readings from the Old Testament and fifty readings from the New Testament highlighting as many of the major biblical themes and characters as possible. It was decided to take a period of twenty weeks to cover these one hundred readings. With that length of schedule each week would consist of only five

¹² More information regarding this worthy ministry can be found on their website: www.scriptureunion.org.

readings. This lower number of readings (versus seven per week in the second trial) seemed to be less intimidating for those who were relative novices to the notion of daily Bible reading and worship.

Several members off-handedly remarked that they were perpetually behind in whatever Bible reading program they had ever attempted. With just five readings per week this meant that they could miss a day here or there and still not fall so far behind that they felt overwhelmed. There is a delicate balance between challenging individuals to attempt something new that will be meaningful and yet also achievable. Set the bar too low and the exercise has little effect on the individual's daily life. But set the too high and beginners who are unaccustomed to including spiritual disciplines in their daily schedule can easily get disheartened and simply quit.

A visual aide was developed to help encourage participation which remained in front of the congregation for several weeks leading up to the beginning of the program. This helped to build anticipation. Each person who committed to participating in the E100 program had their name written on a red "brick" and this helped build a "wall of commitment." The psychological advantage of beginning the third trial at the start of a new year was also utilized to good effect. The E100 reading plan was begun on New Year's Day, 2012; whereas the less successful second trial had begun toward the end of May of the previous year.

The E100 program was user-friendly and very inexpensive. All the basic materials were provided by the church to the congregational members free of charge. There were various study guides available for purchase but the heart of the program was beautiful in

its simplicity. There was a single tri-fold card about the dimensions of a playing card on which all one hundred readings were listed. Another incentivizing aspect to the card provided by Scripture Union was that each reading was numbered and had a very small, corresponding, circular, perforated punch-out. Several participants remarked how “fun” it was to be able to punch out the card on a daily basis! It sounds rather silly but “go figure.” It worked. Apparently, humans are easily amused.

The initial goal was to have one hundred people participate which fit in well with the one-hundred theme. While that goal was not met the number of those participating greatly increased over the second trial. At the conclusion of the sign-up period eighty-four participants committed themselves to participating. This was more than a three-fold increase over participation in the second trial. This high participation rate generated a lot of enthusiasm as the E100 program began. In order to emphasize the connection between the daily readings and Sunday mornings not only was the sermon text chosen from one the previous week’s readings but the mid-week prayer and Bible study group also used these texts as a basis of discussion.

At the end of the twenty weeks a short, one page survey of only ten questions was sent out to all the participants with a self-addressed, stamped envelope included (See Appendix C). The survey questions were not solely discussion type questions as in the flawed, second trial survey but also consisted of short answer questions as well as utilizing the “Likert scale” in about half of the questions. A cover letter was included with the survey and more attention was paid to the attractiveness of the survey than in the second trial. Thankfully the return rate on the survey for this third trial was much higher than the second trial. As noted in the first chapter, thirty surveys were returned which

represents about thirty-six percent of the eighty-four who participated in the program, which almost doubles the percentage returned. It also represents a six-fold increase in the total number of surveys received. The general response to the survey was very encouraging. The great majority of those who responded felt that their participation in the program helped them to increase both the frequency and depth of their practice of daily worship.

Basic Research Question and Summary of Survey Responses for Third Trial

Another major problem with the second trial was a lack of clear focus of the basic research question. Much time and reflection was given to this area for the third trial. For this third trial the basic research question was *“Does participation in a daily reading plan, which is connected to the Sunday morning worship sermon text, promote an increased frequency in the practice of daily worship, enrich the participant’s experience of corporate worship and help develop a closer connection to God throughout the week?”* There were significant exploratory aspects of this research which included identifying the congregation’s daily worship practices prior to the project and how those patterns were impacted by the project.

In order to get at this basic, broader question a survey was developed using ten more specific questions. Question one stated, “Briefly describe your previous practice of daily worship or Bible reading prior to beginning the E100 challenge.” This question was designed to give a snapshot of the practices of the participants before they began the E100 Challenge. This first question was then subdivided into four smaller questions.

In response to the question of how often per week the member engaged in Bible reading the average response was approximately three times per week. Those on the high end of the range were eleven members who answered “5-7” times per week. These were balanced out by the twelve respondents who answered variously: “0 - only Sundays in church;” “sporadic;” “occasional;” “inconsistently” and “1-2” times per week.¹³ Their widely varying responses demonstrate the complexity of developing a daily worship regimen that appeals to a diverse collection of people whose daily practices may be miles apart. It also indicates that the program was successful in recruiting not only those who had already developed a habit of daily worship but novices to the practice, as well as those whose practice of daily worship was inconsistent.

When asked about the average length of time for their daily spiritual discipline prior to this program the answers ranged from zero to sixty minutes with the average range coming in between fifteen and twenty minutes. There was no particular, stated goal concerning the length of worship. Future studies could delve into whether or not those who practice daily worship would derive a spiritual benefit by increasing the length of their worship and whether or not adding a second exercise of worship would enrich their experience (i.e., such as a time of both morning and evening worship).

When quizzed about the length of readings the responders read prior to this project the answers ranged from none to four chapters with the average length slightly less than one chapter per day. Only four individuals reported reading three to four chapters per day. This is significant because it indicates that many daily, Bible reading plans are overly ambitious. In order to read through the Bible in a year, as many plans

¹³ From Third Trial Survey dated May 21, 2012.

prescribe, the participant must read between three and four chapters per day. While a noble goal that volume of reading is simply beyond the scope of what many modern Christians seem able to accomplish.

The last portion of the first question asked if the participant normally practiced any other spiritual disciplines besides the reading of scripture. Nineteen of the responders cited prayer as an accompanying activity which represents almost sixty percent of the participants. This relatively high percentage is not surprising considering that most polls indicate that ninety percent of Americans pray and three out of four claim to pray on a daily basis.¹⁴ Six members indicated that they pair Bible reading with more in-depth Bible studies or other devotional guides which represents around nineteen percent of participants. Other responses included listening to Christian music (two); scripture memorization/recitation (two). These results seem to indicate that there is a natural connection between scripture reading and prayer for the majority of Christians. To best utilize this organic connection it may be helpful to include some kind of “prayer prompts” along with the prescribed readings. This also lends credence to the notion that daily worship is a dialogue between the believer and God.

The second question in the survey polled the participants on how often they read the daily scripture readings assigned as a part of the E100 program on average over the course of the twenty weeks. Answers ranged from once per week to daily. The average response was five days per week. This represents a significant increase from the number of times these same individuals read prior to the project. The prior average was three

¹⁴ George Gallop, Jr., “As Nation Observes National Day of Prayer, 9 in 10 Pray -- 3 in 4 Daily,” Gallup Inc., last modified May 6, 1999, accessed June 25, 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/3874/nation-observes-national-day-prayer-pray-daily.aspx>.

times per week. This represents a sixty percent increase of the average number of days per week that the participant was engaging in daily worship through the utilization of these assigned readings. These were exciting results and indicated a positive outcome to the first of the three main components of the basic research question which was “Does participation in a daily reading plan which is connected to the Sunday morning worship sermon text promote an increased frequency of the practice of daily worship?” The results of the survey seem to indicate a resounding “yes.” There was also a significant increase in the average amount of time spent in worship from an average of around fifteen minutes prior to the project to around twenty minutes during the exercise. So this third trial succeeded in significantly increasing both the frequency and length of the participant’s daily worship.

Among those twelve members who indicated that their exercise of daily worship prior to this trial was either “Never” or at the most only “Once or Twice a Week,” their weekly rates of worship increased the most dramatically. During the twenty week exercise this same group practiced daily worship on average four times per week which represents in many cases a fourfold increase. Success among this group is particularly satisfying as it represents a real opportunity to help these members mature spiritually and gradually begin to see worship as a natural and integral part of daily living.

The third question was the first question to utilize a Likart scale. It asked,

On a scale of 1-10 (1 being the lowest; 10 being the highest) how would you say the E100 readings positively affected your sense of closeness to God throughout the week? (i.e., “10” [Highest rating; “definitely helped me feel closer to God

throughout the week”] – “1” [Lowest rating; “had no effect on my sense of spiritual connection to God during the week.”)]¹⁵

This question was seeking to measure how effective the trial had been in helping participants feel a deeper connection to God throughout the week and not just on Sunday mornings. The average score on a scale of one to ten was around eight. Only one person indicated that it had “no effect.” As was noted earlier the compartmentalization of faith is one of the great challenges of the modern, North American church.

The church would benefit greatly from embracing a vision of worship which encompasses all of life. This kind of daily connection to God helps the church understand that worship is not just something we do once a week on Sunday mornings. By increasing the frequency of daily worship and fostering a deeper sense of connection to God the church begins to see worship as the foundation of our identity as Christ followers and not just something we “do.” Hopefully, it becomes a way of living and not just another item on an ever lengthening “to do” list.

As a greater percentage of the congregation engages in daily worship it hopefully also begins to change the culture of the church and the “norms” of discipleship and behavior. As believers begin to see the benefits of consistent daily worship it works to break down the notion that daily worship is just a monastic practice or something which should be left to the “spiritual elite” or the “paid professionals.” God calls all his children to “keep in step with the Spirit” and “pray without ceasing” and in that sense all of life should be viewed as an expression of our worship of God and our devotion to Him.

¹⁵ From Third Trial Survey dated May 21, 2012.

The sense of closeness to God as measured by the survey is by definition a subjective measurement. Other less subjective indicators could be developed for possible future studies. For instance a spouse or spiritual mentor could be included in the evaluation process to see if an outside observer sensed that the individual grew spiritually through the exercise or more clearly demonstrated healthy, spiritual fruit during the course of their daily life as a result.

Question four dealt with how the readings were used. It asked, “Did you use the E100 readings 1) individually, 2) among family, or 3) with others in a small group? (Circle any that apply).” One hundred percent indicated that they used them individually. Twenty-three percent also used them with their family and thirteen percent also used them in a small group setting. These figures indicate that the overwhelming majority of people consider daily worship an individual discipline. This is both understandable and somewhat disappointing. We live in an intensely individualistic culture and the uniform response to this question only highlights that fact. However, the church is intended by God to be an alternative counter-culture to the world. The community of the early church as chronicled in the Book of Acts demonstrates that daily worship among the fellowship of believers can be a powerful engine for church growth.¹⁶ The responses to this question demonstrate how far we have to grow in this regard.

Question five asked,

On a scale of 1-10 (1 being the lowest; 10 being the highest) how effective were the daily readings at prompting a personal time of worship as opposed to simply an intellectual exercise? (10 – “felt very worshipful & led to other spiritual

¹⁶ cf. Acts 2-4.

exercises like prayer;" 1 – "felt rather dry & became simply an intellectual exercise.")¹⁷

The average response was approximately seven. One person commented, "These readings prompted me to be more consistent."¹⁸ The purpose of this question was to try to determine whether or not the Bible readings had the ability to inspire worship or whether the process of reading simply became an academic exercise. The relatively high number of seven seems to indicate that the simple process of reading scripture can inspire a worshipful attitude and a natural movement into other spiritual exercises such as prayer without the need for additional resources. The issue of additional resources does come up in a later question.

Question six asked, "On a scale of 1-10 (1 – lowest; 10 - highest) how helpful or encouraging was connecting the E100 readings to Sunday's sermons and Wednesday night Bible Studies?" The average response was just over eight on the ten point scale. This positive response was also reflected in question eight which asked, "What were the most helpful or useful aspects of the E100 readings?" In response one person wrote, "Prompted contextual reading; questions prompted more thought." Another said, "Prepared me for Sunday sermons and what to expect during the week."¹⁹ This is also consistent with responses to the second trial.

Connecting Sunday sermons to the daily readings proved to be a powerful aspect of the program. Though the sermon texts and titles were often printed in the previous Sunday's bulletin even prior to this exercise, it seems that few took note of the upcoming

¹⁷ From Third Trial Survey dated May 21, 2012.

¹⁸ From Third Trial Survey dated May 21, 2012.

¹⁹ From Third Trial Survey dated May 21, 2012.

sermon text or took time to read it beforehand. The communal sense of encouragement and accountability seemed to focus everyone's attention. The notion of preparing oneself for Sunday morning, corporate worship has for the most part fallen by the wayside. Through this exercise preparing for Sunday worship became more of an intentional aspect of daily worship. This is another significant finding that not only enriches the individual but the entire Church as well.

The communal aspect of the exercise helped break down the individualization of modern practices of daily worship. Very few devotional resources are designed for groups of people but rather are overwhelmingly marketed to individual believers. This feeds into the "just Jesus and me" mentality that pervades much of North American Christianity. The simple act of reading the same scriptures as those being read by fellow congregants helped the participants sense a connection with larger Body of Christ.

This communal discipline also served to break down the invisible barrier between Sunday mornings and Monday mornings by de-compartmentalizing the practice of their faith. The more consistently patterns of behavior are developed which introduce faith into the daily flow of life, the more likely those artificial compartments will be broken down. There are so many secularizing influences constantly at work on the typical believer that if those forces are not intentionally resisted they will ultimately relegate a believer's faith to nothing more than a part-time hobby.

Contemplating the upcoming sermon text during the week facilitated a deeper reflection on the scriptures and allowed the reader to more easily contemplate its everyday relevance in the context of their daily living. Almost one-fourth of the

respondents (7) mentioned the connection between Sunday sermons and daily readings as the most helpful aspect of the project. One person wrote, “Loved the connection between readings and sermon. Took it out of history and into the present.”²⁰ That kind of contextualization – bridging the gap between the ancient and modern worlds - is perhaps one of the more challenging aspects of Bible reading and reflection. Helping to make ancient scriptures come alive and be considered relevant to an individual’s modern life is a significant achievement.

One of the goals of the project was to help individuals establish a routine of daily worship that would continue beyond the twenty weeks of the project. Question seven asked,

On a scale of 1-10(1 – lowest; 10 – highest) how has participating in this exercise positively affected your continuing and future practice of daily worship and scripture reading? (1 – “has had no effect;” 10 – “has strongly inspired me to continue reading scripture daily.”)²¹

The average response was slightly over seven on the ten point scale. This positive response indicates the generally affirmative reaction participants had to the program as a whole. One individual who had previously indicated in the first question that they were already practicing daily worship on average of five times per week rated their response to question seven as a three and then put a note to the side which said, “Was planning to anyway.”²² If you look at only the eleven individuals who (in response to question one) prior to this exercise practiced daily worship either sporadically or no more than twice per week, then the response to question seven drops down to just above a six on a ten point scale. This indicates that those with a less frequent pattern of daily worship may

²⁰ From Third Trial Survey dated May 21, 2012.

²¹ From Third Trial Survey dated May 21, 2012.

²² From Third Trial Survey dated May 21, 2012.

need additional support structures or incentives to encourage a continuation of the practice of daily worship going forward. For example, those less experienced with daily worship could be paired with a mentor who is more consistent or connected with a peer group which helps generate greater motivation and more consistent future practice.

Over one-fourth (8) of the respondents said that the most useful aspect of the program was providing a helpful overview of the Bible from beginning to end. This indicates a significant desire to know and comprehend the breadth of God's Story. It is easy for preachers and laypersons alike to neglect vast portions of the Older Testament. A structured reading program which draws equally from both Testaments helps address that imbalance so often seen in the modern church. The Older Covenant scriptures span such a long time frame and come from such various cultural settings that bridging the gap between ancient and modern contexts is decidedly more challenging. These comments reflect the importance of helping believers explore both the depth and the breadth of the Bible.

Question nine asked, "What were the least helpful aspects? How could it be improved to be a more effective tool for promoting daily worship and a closer relationship with God?" Thirty percent (9) mentioned the need for more commentary and a deeper understanding of the context of each particular reading. One person put it rather bluntly, "Later in the series readings got more difficult; random reading of difficult passages – discouraging and meaningless." Another participant wrote, "Some readings were a struggle; more commentary with context." A few others felt as though the readings left out too many significant passages. One person commented, "It skipped so much good stuff in the Bible." Only one person mentioned that the length of the passages

was a hindrance. They noted honestly, “Got bogged down in lengthy passages. I’m lazy about study.”²³ One wonders whether many of those who did not return their surveys felt the same way.

Finally question ten asked, “On a scale of 1-10(1 – lowest, “Not important;” 10 – highest, “very important”) how important is daily worship in helping you become a better disciple of Jesus Christ?” The average response was over eight on this ten point scale. This indicates a strong confidence in the link between the practice of daily worship and maturing in Christian discipleship. This is another indicator that the basic research question has been answered positively in all three components. As stated earlier that question asks, “Does participation in a daily reading plan, which is connected to the Sunday morning worship sermon text, promote an increased frequency in the practice of daily worship, enrich the participant’s experience of corporate worship and help develop a closer connection to God throughout the week?” Growing in discipleship is a complex God-empowered process which cannot be achieved through any program. The relative success of this project was completely dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the individuals involved. The power of any program to bring about transformation is directly linked to its ability to create space in the believer’s life for God’s Spirit to be at work. It is hoped that even for those who were not able to complete the daily worship challenge, this model of daily worship spurred an awareness of its potential benefits and ultimately a deeper thirst for God’s living presence.

Though each of the three trials was unique and had varying rates of participation and levels of success, on the whole these trials served to encourage the practice of daily

²³ From Third Trial Survey dated May 21, 2012.

worship in the lives of those disciples of Jesus who participated. In the next and final chapter we will examine the broader lessons and discuss the implications of this project and how it might benefit the larger church. We will identify important questions which these three trials have raised and which may warrant further exploration. And finally we will discuss how future trials which promote the practice of daily worship might be improved based on these findings so as to more effectively encourage a consistent practice of daily worship in the life of the church.

CHAPTER FIVE: OUTCOMES WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout this project we have seen that the practice of daily worship can make a significant difference in the life of the believer. Daily worship can be a powerful tool in developing greater spiritual maturity. In our age of hyper-individualization it is somewhat surprising that the church has lost its focus on such a basic, individual exercise. The practice of daily worship remains sporadic and unfocused for many American Christians. In a recent Barna survey while fifty-six percent of those surveyed considered the Bible to be the “inspired Word of God” only thirty-seven percent reported reading the Bible once a week or more.¹ As noted earlier back in chapter one, Americans may on the whole revere the Bible but they seldom read it.

Too often when envisioning a practice of daily worship modern believers view personal, private worship as their only avenue but to do so truncates historic practice. When you examine the biblical practice of worship the norm is more communal than individual.² Hebrew believers and early Christian communities had worship woven into the fabric of their daily living.³ Roman Catholic Churches often offer “daily mass” or daily prayer services. Other “high church” traditions, such as Anglican or Episcopalian, also often provide these kinds of daily, communal worship services. But this is not the norm among the majority of protestant or evangelical churches throughout the country.

¹ “The State of the Bible: 6 Trends for 2014,” Barna Group Inc., last modified April 8, 2014, accessed June 22, 2015, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/664-the-state-of-the-Bible-6-trends-for-2014#.ViVS236rTrd>.

² cf. Leviticus 23 & Ezra 3.

³ cf. Acts 2:46; Hebrews 10:25.

How daily worship is practiced and promoted in other, various church traditions would be a helpful future course of study.

The project included resources for worship among couples, families and individual worshipers. In order to expand the practice of daily worship the church must work harder and more creatively at developing resources that can be used in a variety of contexts. Just as there is no “one size fits all” spiritual discipline for every believer so too there is no one prescribed method of daily worship.

For too long the church has concentrated an inordinate percentage of its time, energy and resources on producing performances on Sunday mornings for religious consumers. On the whole it has neglected the formative power of *daily* worship which has even greater potential power to transform religious consumers into mature disciples. In short the worship life of the modern church is badly out of balance. By placing so much emphasis on corporate worship the church reinforces, in a subtle way, the compartmentalization of life which relegates faith to a “Sunday morning only” expression. The church must reclaim the ancient discipline of daily worship in order to make disciples who integrate their faith into their daily living.

Sunday morning worship should serve both as the culmination of the Body’s everyday worship and a launch pad for worship throughout the following week. Corporate worship should not be considered an exercise which satisfies our need for worship but rather a model of worship which “whets our appetites” and inspires the believer into a week filled with daily worship. Rather than view worship as an end unto itself pastors and worship leaders should more often consider how their practice of

corporate worship can shape, inform and empower a more regular practice of daily worship.

There are so many variables that affect the daily settings of believers' lives that any daily worship curriculum must be flexible enough to adapt to those particular circumstances. The daily worship of a father and mother with three young children at home may entail reading a Bible story to the kids before bed and praying together as a family. An "empty nester" couple may find great meaning reading scripture together over breakfast and praying for one another as they begin their day. A young, single business woman may prefer to listen to scripture through headphones using her phone as she rides the subway on her long commute to work each morning. A middle-aged man who telecommutes three days a week may appreciate a more challenging curriculum with more in-depth study materials so as to dive deeper into God's Word on those days when he saves time by working from home.

Rather than prescribe one resource to meet the needs of every individual, couple or family, disciples should be encouraged to experiment with different forms of daily worship. This project focused on daily Bible reading and prayer as the cornerstones of daily worship but that should not imply that these are the only spiritual disciplines which can be utilized to promote a daily practice. Further studies could examine how to incorporate a broader range of spiritual disciplines into daily life.

It would also be interesting to explore how different personality types affect the kinds of spiritual disciplines which are a good fit for particular individuals. For example, extroverts may thrive in a communal worship experience (couple or family worship)

while an introvert may flourish in personal, private worship. In our highly individualized culture it is basically assumed that while communal worship experiences can be enriching there is still some basic need for individual “time alone with God.” But would a brother or sister in Christ in India agree with this assumption? How culturally conditioned is our practice of daily worship? Personal spiritual inventories could also be developed to help the church member determine the types of disciplines which would best fit their personality and “spiritual temperament.”

Experimentations with spiritual disciplines such as meditation, journaling or fasting could help expand the spiritual “toolbox” of believers. Many of these disciplines have become lost arts. Pastors would do well to expand their own personal experience with these disciplines so that they can become more passionate and intentional practitioners as well as models for their congregants. Over the past generation pastors have become more comfortable with managing church programs and less skilled at practicing “spiritual direction” for their flock. That movement away from one of the traditional pastoral tasks also needs to be addressed if true and lasting change is going to be seen in the life of the North American church.

Eugene Peterson gives a rather stinging indictment of the majority of American pastors in his book, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*:

American pastors are abandoning their posts...at an alarming rate. They have gone whoring after other gods. What they do with their time under the guise of pastoral ministry hasn't the remotest connection with what the church's pastors have done for most of twenty centuries...They are preoccupied with shopkeeper's concerns – how to keep the customers happy, how to lure customers away from competitors

down the street, how to package the goods so that the customers will lay out more money.⁴

Though written almost thirty years ago it seems that Peterson's concerns over the "consumerization" of the church have only gotten worse. Pastors are not generally rewarded for helping to deepen the daily spiritual practices of their members and so the task becomes neglected and over time even forgotten. With the zeal of a biblical prophet Peterson continues,

The biblical fact is that there are no successful churches. There are, instead, communities of sinners, gathered before God week after week...The pastor's responsibility is to keep the community attentive to God. It is this responsibility that is being abandoned in spades...Three spiritual acts are so basic, so critical, that they determine the shape of everything else. The acts are praying, reading Scripture and giving spiritual direction...It is possible to do pastoral work to the satisfaction of the people who judge our competence and pay our salaries without being either diligent or skilled in them. Since almost never does anyone notice whether we do these things or not...these three acts of ministry suffer widespread neglect.⁵

Sadly, Peterson's charge that the practice of spiritual direction has become a lost art within the life of the church rings true. Pastors are neither encouraged to embody the spiritual disciplines in their own personal lives, nor held accountable for leading their flock in the practice of these disciplines. Encouraging the development of passionate, reflective practitioners of these neglected pastoral tasks could go a long way in bringing lasting change to the life of the local church.

⁴ Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 1.

⁵ Peterson, *Working the Angles*, 2.

Conclusions from First Trial: Family Devotions

The first trial of this project involved inviting young families to engage in family devotions. Families have become so busy and overly programmed in the world and in the church that there is very little emphasis on this kind of spiritual formation of children. Again the modern church's emphasis has been on developing "programs" which most often require that participants gather at the church's facilities. They also frequently divide the family according to age. And while there are definite advantages to age specific curricula, there are also deficiencies which must be recognized and mitigated. Some congregations have addressed this issue by developing more inter-generational programs which is a significant and positive development. However, churches need to more intentionally empower and equip parents to teach the faith to their children within the home environment. It must be more clearly recognized that God has uniquely called and equipped families to be micro-communities of spiritual formation.

The Apostle Paul's instructions to the Ephesians regarding family life speak to the important role parents are designed by God to play in the faith formation of their children:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise— "so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.⁶

The parents of children are uniquely positioned by God to the primary agents of spiritual formation in their children's lives. Parents must once again be willing to take on

⁶ Ephesians 6:1-4.

this mantle of responsibility and not simply cede this Divine calling over to the children's ministry team or to a youth pastor. Unfortunately, too many modern believers turn the reigns of their children's spiritual direction over to the "paid professionals." The underlying reasons for this lack of spiritual engagement on the part of parents are myriad and could entail a whole new subject of further study. Even something as simple, and seemingly successful as the rise of the Sunday School program over the past seventy-five years has had unintended consequences. Flourishing children's programs have at times unconsciously communicated the idea that they could do a better job of inspiring faith than parents. And while we should be grateful for dedicated and gifted leaders who understand the crucial importance of the church's ministry to children, pastors should also constantly remind church leaders that the greatest engine for disciple-making is the family itself as designed and instituted by God. In that sense all the church's ministry to children should have as one of its foundations the goal of equipping and empowering parents to be more effective disciple-makers of their own children.

As the church develops more resources for parents to use with their children, it must be remembered that modern families are often "on the go" going from one activity to another and that some of their largest chunks of "free time" may not in fact be in the home. When asked about "other faith building practices" two of the families in the trial mentioned that the car was actually the place where the best "spiritual conversations" took place. That's an interesting twist on the traditional concept of a family devotion. Whether listening to Christian music or hearing a news story and discussing how faith might impact that situation, the automobile has in some ways become an extension of the family living room or kitchen table. Spontaneous conversations are a vital part of any

relationship whether particularly “spiritual” or not. When parents are alert to those opportunities, those kinds of spontaneous spiritual conversations can be powerful tools in the disciple-making process. Those are the type of situations which already exist in the daily life of most Christian families. Turning those everyday settings into faith-forming arenas is not a matter of carving out new space in a busy schedule but simply a matter of enlightening parents as to the opportunities at hand and encouraging them to be more intentional and to take greater initiative through faith forming conversations.

An even more fundamental issue than communicating your faith to your child is simply communicating and relating to your child. A time of family devotion is always going to seem stiff and forced if the parents don’t have a good foundation of relating and communicating with their child on an on-going basis. For example, if a father is often disengaged from his children and simply reads the paper or watches sports and rarely cares to converse with them, then a deeper level of communication about matters of the heart and soul is obviously going to be difficult to achieve.

What does this proclivity toward car-bound conversations say about our “on-the-go” culture? Apparently time in the car is some of the only time that parents and children are literally sitting down together and not staring at some form of screen or entertainment device. Unfortunately, most families no longer eat meals together on a regular basis. The envisioned ideal of regularly sitting around the family dinner table needs to take modern realities into account. When developing a family devotional curriculum there needs to be a balance between providing a clear, helpful structure and encouraging spontaneity. Inflexible structures do little to foster creative, fruitful conversations yet solely spontaneous discussions may lack depth and consistency.

Varying personality types inevitably lead to different parenting styles. And those unique parenting traits should not be stifled but harnessed and utilized for their maximum advantage. Just as not all spiritual disciplines fit every person, not all modes of family worship fit every family. An instrument could be developed that would help parents identify their own parenting style and recommend a type of devotional structure that would best suit their family's culture. More spontaneous personality types may in fact discuss spiritual matters more productively in the car going down the street than sitting around a table. One of the single moms in the group (there were two single moms out of the ten families) remarked in her "Initial Family Questionnaire":

The car seems to be our easiest focused time since the kids aren't as distracted by other things. I teach moral lessons as we see people. For example: we see a teen driving with very loud music and we talk about being considerate to others. Driving along we look at nature and talk about God's creation. I have an easier time engaging in the car.⁷

Perhaps a family devotional specifically for the car could be identified or designed. On the face of it this might seem somewhat far-fetched but considering the popularity of children's CD's, it might actually be a good way to meet families where they are in their daily context. (In long, fourteen hour van rides to visit family, my wife and I have instilled in our kids a love for "books on tape" [actually "CDs & now ipods" – it's hard for language to keep up with technology]. We have listened to wonderful children's classics such as Lewis' *Narnia* series and others like *Kidnapped* and *Robin Hood*. The *Narnia* books in particular offer entry into all sorts of constructive "spiritual conversations." For instance, after listening to "The Last Battle" we had a very animated discussion about the "end times" and the return of Christ and the Bible's vision of a new

⁷ From First Trial Survey dated December 15, 2010.

heaven and new earth.) Developing a car-based, family devotional curriculum could be an interesting future project.

In discussing the goal of establishing a practice of family worship care was taken to discuss this with these parents in a very positive light and not motivate out of guilt. However, in these conversations there is inherently an underlying sense of critique of the status quo. But just as a basketball player appreciates the helpful hints and encouragements of his coach on how to improve his shooting technique, hopefully these parents understand that the goal is to make their job of parenting a more rewarding, meaningful and ultimately more fruitful vocation. On the whole the parents seemed encouraged and empowered by this project and that is a significant achievement in itself.

There is always a danger that overworked parents will feel burdened by yet another “activity” that must be “checked off.” The hope was to introduce to parents the joy and deeply meaningful work of helping to foster the soulfulness of their child. The aim was to help families begin to understand that family worship is not just another activity but rather it is the foundation of a family’s identity as a micro-community within God’s larger covenantal community, the church.

Family worship should not be seen as an addendum to an otherwise full schedule but the frame around which all other activities are placed. The ancient church tradition of morning and evening prayers goes all the way back to the older covenant practice of morning and evening sacrifices.⁸ Perhaps those morning and evening “rhythms” could be more intentionally incorporated into a future curriculum. Those families that indicated

⁸ cf. 2 Chronicles 13:11; Ezra 3:3.

that they would simply prefer to read from a version of the Bible and then discuss it with their children may not even need a “curriculum” per se but may simply need guidance in helping re-frame those discussions so that they can be seen as significant components of worship.

Brother Lawrence’s concept of “practicing the presence of God” may be particularly helpful to parents who narrowly define worship as more formal times of instruction. The Hebrews also modeled a more holistic approach to worship. Moses encouraged this holistic, “all of life” approach to forming faith in our children when he wrote,

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.⁹

Teaching the faith to the next generation is too important a task to relegate solely to formal times of instruction but should saturate every aspect of daily living.

The terms “family devotions” and “family worship” were used somewhat interchangeably throughout this trial. There are strengths and weaknesses to each expression. The term “family devotions” seems less inclusive and could become a one-dimensional discussion of the Bible instead of an entry point which ushers the participants into the presence of God. After all, it is not the Bible we are called to worship but God himself. Yet using “family worship” as a descriptor was somewhat problematic due to the high percentage (roughly 85%) of those who basically had no previous experience with any kind of family worship and may have been intimidated by

⁹ Deuteronomy 11:18-20.

the formality or all-inclusive nature of that term. To the uninitiated perhaps family devotion sounds a little less daunting than family worship. Hopefully, in the future a more holistic concept of worship can be effectively encouraged and these families can embrace a broader approach to family worship.

The written resources or “devotions” as they are often called are simply a tool that fosters a family’s identity as a worshipping community. Much more could be done in helping parents to define and identify the unique aspects of their children’s’ personality and spiritual maturity as well as the spiritual culture of their particular family. Once the parents have a deeper understanding of how they naturally relate to one another and their children then a resource could be identified which would more accurately address their particular needs. Once again Peterson’s charge to pastors to reclaim their role as personal “spiritual directors” for those under their care, in particular to families, seems particularly relevant and applicable.

Early Hebrew families did not have copies of the scriptures to read and meditate on and yet they were successful in passing their faith along to the next generation. Their faith in Yahweh was the like an ever-flowing river of water in which they constantly swam. As the Hebrew children observed their parents work, relate, play and function within the covenant community they emulated the faith of their parents. As many have noted, even within our modern, western context which places a high premium on formal, classroom instruction, faith is still something which is often more “caught than taught.” When understood within that holistic context we must help moms and dads understand that family devotions or a family worship curriculum cannot make up for a *faith-less* everyday life. Family worship should be the culmination and articulation of a faith that is

embodied in the way we work, in the way we treat others, in the way we show concern for neighbor, in our compassion for the lost and in the quality of our love for one another. As James puts it we must be “doers of the word and not hearers only.”¹⁰

Conclusions from the Second and Third Trials

One of the most encouraging outcomes of the second and third trials was the deeper connection which participants felt toward God. This deeper communion with God is really the heart of what worship is all about. In the modern church worship is often defined as singing or music but that narrower definition stifles the worshiper’s imagination in regard to the depth and breadth of forms which worship can encompass. As Brother Lawrence has taught us worship is not really about forms at all but rather about “practicing the presence of God” in the ordinary moments of day to day living.

While a closer sense of God’s presence is an important goal to keep in one’s view, we must resist the temptation to think that we can manufacture an experience that will guarantee an individual’s personal encounter with God. There will always be an inherent tension in promoting a particular discipline or mode of worship and at the same time acknowledging its limits as a human construct. Only to the extent that a spiritual discipline opens the individual’s heart and mind up to the power of the Holy Spirit will these disciplines create a closer communion with Christ. God alone has the power to draw us to Himself. His absolute freedom to move in the heart of the believer cannot be manipulated or controlled by our actions. As Jesus told Nicodemus, “The wind blows

¹⁰ James 1:22; King James Version.

wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."¹¹ Like Lewis' wild lion "Aslan", the Spirit cannot be tamed and our encounters with God cannot be manufactured by following a prescribed, mechanical list of steps.

There is a significant difference between reading scripture and listening to the Word of God. In a sense reading is always controlled by the reader. The reader can stop or start at any time. If the reader feels uncomfortable or convicted by what they are reading they may simply close the book and move to another less threatening activity. Listening to God's Word takes a higher degree of concentration and discipline. A good listener humbly recognizes that God, as the speaker, is in control and continues listening even if what is communicated is difficult to hear. We have all had the experience of mechanically, almost mindlessly reading several paragraphs of text yet when finished very little of what was read was absorbed or retained. An additional use of reflection questions could help deepen the listening experience for the reader. Pastors must be creative in helping mere readers become attentive listeners as well.

It must be constantly recognized that the spiritual disciplines are designed to open the believer's eyes and quiet the heart so that the "still, small voice"¹² of God can be best heard. The disciplines don't change God; rather they change us so that we can be attentive to God's omnipresence. That's why the most effective "forms" of worship are those which are all but forgotten by the worshiper. Yes worship must be intentional but in a sense it must also be self-forgetful. Jesus seems to make a similar point when He

¹¹ John 3:8; New Living Translation.

¹² 1 Kings 19:12.

preached in the Sermon on the Mount, “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.”¹³ Giving is a spiritual discipline that can help us separate our personal identity from our material possessions. Self-forgetfulness can serve to make a clearer distinction between the means of a particular discipline and its aim, namely communion with God. Focusing too much on the form of a particular spiritual discipline can in this sense become counter-productive and lead us away from the very thing we are after which is a closer walk with our Creator.

The second and third trials helped establish the importance of helping members of the church de-compartmentalize their faith. For many believers there seems to be very little sense of connection between Sunday mornings and the rest of the week. One of the consistent themes of the research was that a practice of daily worship which is closely related to corporate, Sunday morning worship, and in particular to the sermon text, helped to break down that artificial barrier between Sundays and the rest of the week. The Sunday morning service helped set a pattern that could be continued throughout the week. The corporate gathering for worship could be compared to a group of musicians who gather for a “jam session” once a week who are then able to develop related musical movements or themes in their private practice throughout the following week. The corporate expression of music doesn’t exhaust the musical possibilities but does just the opposite; it inspires and informs the individual pursuit of that discipline. So too corporate worship can both inspire and inform private practice.

Connecting the Sunday sermon text with the daily readings also helped individual participants feel a closer bond with their fellow church members. Tackling common tasks

¹³ Matthew 6:3.

together can have a unifying effect. Just as kids feel a kinship with their classmates as they engage in the same homework assignments, fellow church members can develop a greater sense of camaraderie, mutual encouragement and accountability as they read and reflect on common scripture texts. This sense of community was further enhanced through engaging in a common Wednesday night Bible study together. More could be done to explore other avenues of small group experiences which could potentially increase the feeling of community even more.

One question that could be studied to a greater degree is how the day of the week affects an individual's daily worship. Is Sunday morning inherently different because the participant is anticipating gathering with other believers later that morning. Does this spur them to "catch up" on the suggested readings? Is it a form of accountability? Or do they reduce their personal time reading and reflecting on the Word when they know they will be studying it corporately later that morning? Sunday mornings can also be hectic, especially for families. Perhaps the greater regularity of the work week enables those who have children in the home to have more consistency with spiritual disciplines during the week than on the weekends.

Another field of inquiry could be devoted to the importance of length of scripture readings in faith formation. In an earlier age before the proliferation of so many different types of media perhaps a higher volume of scripture reading was more easily attainable. A hundred years ago books were the only medium available to many families. And the family Bible might well have been one of only a handful of books which the average family even owned. With the advent of radio, later television, and now the internet there are literally a million choices of media available to most North American Christians. Is it

unrealistic of modern church leaders to expect their average member to read a chapter or more of scripture a day? This is perhaps debatable, but when the average American watches over four hours of television per day (which adds up to two months of solid TV watching per year!) it seems reasonable to challenge believers to dedicate at least twenty or thirty minutes of their day to worship, through Bible reading and prayer.¹⁴

Of course each church exists within its own cultural context. What might be expected of a congregation in a university town in which most members are highly literate may be very different from a church set in the middle of a working class neighborhood or one with a high percentage of recent immigrants. One could ask, “Is reading a daily Christian blog on the internet with a short reflection on a verse or two of scripture sufficient to spur greater communion with God?” Or someone may ask their pastor “Is listening to the Bible on my smart phone on my commute to work a good alternative to traditional Bible reading?” It could be argued that recorded audio media actually harken back to an earlier age when, for most Christians in the world, God’s Word was delivered to them orally with little or no access to the written word.

Perhaps an even more fundamental question is “Why does the volume of scripture read on a daily basis matter at all?” One of the arguments for reading larger portions of scripture on a regimented schedule is that many modern Christians have become ignorant of the larger biblical narrative. Part of the issue which needs to be addressed in our modern context is the biblical illiteracy which pervades the present day church. Many believers today might easily go through an entire year of church life and hear few if any sermons on Old Testament texts. A reading program which highlights the broader,

¹⁴ Norman Herr, “Television & Health,” California State University Northridge, last modified 2007, accessed July 24, 2015, <https://www.csun.edu/science/health/docs/tv&health.html>.

biblical story from both the Old and New Testaments can go a long way in encouraging a deeper faith that is enriched by this more expansive perspective on how God has related to His people throughout salvation history.

However, one of the pitfalls of a broadly-based, structured Bible reading plan like the E100 which was utilized for this project is the danger that reading one or two chapters of scripture per day simply becomes another activity to check off on overly long “to do” list. With this mindset reading the Bible becomes an end unto itself rather than a means by which we commune with God. Reflection questions which encourage the reader to think more deeply about what was read and how it might apply to their own relationship with God or suggested possibilities for prayer along the same themes of the scripture text may help make reading plans comprised of longer passages more of an avenue for worship rather than just another mindless, even soulless activity.

In contrast to a modern mindset, which could mistakenly view reading longer scripture passages as just another goal-oriented activity, many saints in ages past have benefited from meditating on single verses or phrases or even single words of scripture. The book of Psalms begins by extolling those who meditate on God’s Word:

Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
and who meditates on his law day and night.
That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.¹⁵

¹⁵ Psalm 1:1-3.

The saint commended here in the first Psalm is one who gains their satisfaction by meditating on God's law and not just reading it. Meditation connotes deeply pondering and ruminating on God's Word.¹⁶ There is a perception, whether true or imagined, that meditation is more advanced than the simple reading of scripture. Perhaps the notion of meditating on a shorter portion of scripture intimidates novices. The discipline of meditation has also been tainted in the minds of some Christians by its use in popular culture and in various eastern religions. Yet the art of meditation can in fact be a powerful tool of discipleship and serve to usher the believer into God's living presence and greatly enrich the discipline of reading scripture alone.

This project also begs the question, "How might the effectiveness of a Bible reading plan compare to the use of other daily devotionals?" There are numerous daily devotionals easily available to church members (i.e. - *Our Daily Bread*, *The Upper Room*, *These Days*) which normally offer a reflection on a single verse or some small portion of scripture. But are these types of devotionals as valuable as reading directly from the Bible? One of the assumptions in this project has been that there is inherent value in reading the scriptures as the primary source of content, free of any extended secondary commentary.

Devotionals which reflect on the scriptures have obviously proved helpful to many Christians throughout the centuries. Beloved, classic devotionals such as Oswald Chamber's *My Utmost For His Highest*, or Charles Spurgeon's *Morning and Evening* have enriched generations of Christ's followers. Jonathan Bagster's *Daily Light on the*

¹⁶ cf. Jeremiah 31:33.

Daily Path is somewhat unique in that it does not inject any third party commentary but is simply edited portions of scripture strung together which echo the same topic or theme. Yet, it was assumed for the purposes of this project that no humanly constructed devotional material can match the formative power of the plain Word of God.¹⁷ However, this particular question was not a part of this project but would be an intriguing topic for further study.

Writing more than sixty-five years ago A.W. Tozer sounds prophetic in his scathing description of the “modern church’s” anemic understanding of worship. He writes,

Thanks to our splendid Bible societies and to other effective agencies for the dissemination of the Word, there are today many millions of people who hold "right opinions," probably more than ever before in the history of the Church. Yet I wonder if there was ever a time when true spiritual worship was at a lower ebb. To great sections of the Church the art of worship has been lost entirely, and in its place has come that strange and foreign thing called the "program." This word has been borrowed from the stage and applied with sad wisdom to the type of public service which now passes for worship among us...For it is not mere words that nourish the soul, but God Himself, and unless and until the hearers find God in personal experience they are not the better for having heard the truth. The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring men to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that they may enter into Him, that they may delight in His Presence, may taste and know the inner sweetness of the very God Himself in the core and center of their hearts.¹⁸

Pastor Tozer’s words seem even more applicable to the present day than they did at the time of their writing. As long as Bible reading and other components of a practice of daily worship remain simply part of a “program” than all our sincere efforts will surely fail and come to naught. The notion of “programs” produced by the church positions us once again into the role of spectators and consumers. Perhaps we should use the biblical

¹⁷ cf. 2 Timothy 3:16.

¹⁸ A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, Inc., 2011), 10-12, Kindle.

concepts of “God’s call” and our responsibility to listen and respond when promoting the practice of daily worship.

Too often the Bible or more specifically reading the Bible is treated as “an end unto itself” as Tozer puts it. God revealed His Word to us not simply for the purpose of conveying information but for eliciting transformation. His Word calls for a response and anticipates fruitfulness as it takes root in the humble heart of a receptive hearer. As Isaiah the prophet declared,

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.¹⁹

By God’s Sovereign choice He sends out His Word to see that His Divine will is accomplished. God does not speak fruitlessly or without consequence, but His Word is sent out with intention and for the effect of calling forth faith in the heart of the receiver. If we fail to react to God’s Word it indicates that we have failed to truly listen. Jesus frequently calls his hearers to give utmost attention to His words. As Jesus said at the conclusion of the parable of the sower, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”²⁰ It is not enough to simply shallowly receive the words, they must be planted deeply in the heart to ultimately result in fruitfulness.

As in any relationship there is a give and take nature in our communication with God. Our ability to relate to our fellow human beings stems from the God created capacity to relate to God Himself. Oftentimes unintentionally church leaders reduce the concept of worship to simply “producing” something; saying a prayer, singing a song or

¹⁹ Isaiah 55:10-11; New American Standard Bible.

²⁰ Mark 4:9.

participating in a service of worship. But in fact worship is also “receiving” through listening, observing and being still and silent before God. There is rhythm to worship which should be taken into account by those designing resources aimed at promoting the practice of daily worship. Worship is not a monologue but rather a dialogue, initiated and empowered by the Holy Spirit which connects God and the believer.

The practice of daily worship is a discipline but also a joy and privilege that must be rediscovered if the modern, North American church is to become the kind of converting community which God intends. Like discovering a hidden family jewel long forgotten, daily worship must once again be at the heart of the church’s identity. This goal of fostering daily worship will not be achieved overnight or with a quick fix but must be constantly promoted and modeled to the next generation.

Our great task is to reassert the foundational nature of daily worship and our daily fellowship with God as forming the very heart of the church’s life. Building God’s Kingdom is impossible without daily, even constant communion with the King. Pastors and church leaders must reclaim the centrality of daily worship if the church is to remain an authentic community of Jesus’ disciples. We as God’s people must rediscover the transformative power of daily worship if Christ’s Church is to continue to be a vibrant, disciple-making force in the world.

Appendix A

Materials Related to the First Trial: Family Worship

Initial Family Pre-Trial Questionnaire

(Distributed with curriculum beginning on 9/12/10
& collected questionnaire results on 12/15/10)

What do you think of when you hear the term “family devotion”?

What has been your personal experience of family devotions (if any)?

Were they are part of your family of origin?

If so, of what did they consist?

Do you have any particular spiritual disciplines as a family that you now practice on a regular basis?

Prayers at Meals

Prayers at Bedtime

Prayers at other times

Bible Stories read

When typically read?

How often?

Memorizing Scripture

Playing / Listening to Christian Music

Intentional conversations about spiritual matters (ie – Asking your child “What did you talk about in Sunday School/ Youth today?” as you eat Sunday lunch)

Do you have any other faith-building practices which could benefit other families?

Responses to Initial Family Questionnaire

Question 1: What do you think of when you hear the term “family devotion”?

Responses:

- 1) “Families reading through the Bible together & discussing their thoughts.”
- 2) “No experience”
- 3) “A time for family to get together and grow closer by worshipping God through study & prayer
- 4) “Reading scripture together & talking about it”
- 5) “Time set aside for a family to focus on the Bible & be together.”
- 6) “Sitting together talking about a topic”
- 7) “Learning & growing in faith together”

Question 2: What has been your personal experience of family devotions (if any)?

Responses:

- 1) None
- 2) None
- 3) This has been my first experience – I am very happy with the results. I feel it has strengthened God’s role in our lives with positive effects.
- 4) None
- 5) Before the children came we would do a devotion before bed every night together. We still read the same devotional. It’s just usually at separate times now or with the boys.
- 6) Only with family of origin. Many times just spontaneous in the car, sometimes at breakfast table.
- 7) We have family worship every evening after dinner and before bath & bed

Question 3: Were they are part of your family of origin?

- 1) No
- 2) No
- 3) No – my family did not attend church when I was a child
- 4) No for both of us
- 5) Yes
- 6) Yes
- 7) Mother – no
Father – yes (parents were missionaries)

If so, of what did they consist?

#5 – Bible stories, daily devotionals; #6 - My father always led discussion. I have positive memories. (single mom)

Do you have any particular spiritual disciplines as a family that you now practice on a regular basis?

Family #2 - We discuss our faith as it relates to our situation

Prayers at Meals: Family #1; #3; #4; #5 – The kids take turns saying blessings they learned at pre-school. ; #6; #7

Prayers at Bedtime: Family #3; #4; #5 – Yes. We encourage them to pray out loud or say a prayer to themselves or they ask us to. ; #6; #7

Prayers at other times: Family #3; 4 ; #6 – spontaneous if we are concerned for someone

Bible Stories read: Family #3; #4; #5; #6; #7

When typically read?

Family #3 & #6 - Bedtime; #5- Bedtime or review of SS lessons; #7 – after dinner

How often?

Family #3 & #7 - Every night; #5 & #6 – once a week usually

Memorizing Scripture:

Family #3(sometimes); 4; #5 – have tried some with SS lessons; #7

Playing / Listening to Christian Music: Family #1; #4; #7

Intentional conversations about spiritual matters: Family #3; #4; #5; #7 (occasionally)

(ie – Asking your child “What did you talk about in Sunday School/ Youth today?” as you eat Sunday lunch.)

Do you have any other faith-building practices which could benefit other families?

Family #4 – attending Sunday school, church and Pioneer Clubs (children’s Wed. pm program). Some of our deepest, most meaningful discussions happen in our truck as we’re driving.

#6 – The car seems to be our easiest focused time since the kids aren't distracted by other things. Teach moral lessons as we see people. For example, teen driving with very loud music talk about being considerate to others. Driving around we look at nature – talk about God's creation. I have an easier time engaging them in the car.

Family #1 - Christian/Bible stories on video/DVD

Family #2 – Identifying & discussing tenants of faith as we observe them happening (sinful nature; sovereignty of God; grace of God, etc.)

Family # 3 – The family devotionals we started with this exercise has been especially beneficial – it has helped us incorporate our faith into our daily routine on a deeper level,

Follow-up Questionnaire

(Distributed with curriculum beginning on 9/12/10
& collected questionnaire results on 12/15/10)

How many family devotions did your family do over the past four weeks?

Was this frequency of 3 times a week hard to accomplish? Too many or too few?

Did you find it easier to perform the family devotions on pre-determined, particular nights of the week or did you perform them more spontaneously when you had a little extra time?

Which time of day did you find worked best for your family? (ie- at breakfast; right after supper)

Which stories did your children enjoy or connect with the most?

Rate on a scale of 1 (being the lowest) to 10 (highest) each of the following regarding your family's experience of family devotions:

Fostered greater knowledge of the Bible:

Spurred questions or conversations about God and other spiritual topics:

Fostered family closeness:

Overall effectiveness of devotions:

Would you like to continue family devotions as a regular weekly practice?

How often would you ideally want to have a family devotion?

Would a simple curriculum be helpful (such as what was provided) or would you prefer to simply read from a children's or standard translation of the Bible?

Follow-up Questionnaire (and collective responses)

How many family devotions did your family do over the past four weeks?

#1 – none actually completed

#2 – 3 per week

#3 – four

#4 – 6

#5 – four

#6 – blank

#7 - 12

Was this frequency of 3 times a week hard to accomplish? Too many or too few?

#1 – Yes – for our family it was difficult. Maybe when our kids are older. (Twin boys are three years old.)

#2 - No

#3 – Three was a hard frequency to achieve due to work, school and other time commitments

#4 – Depended on the week – sometimes you could do more than three, sometimes getting three done was hard.

#5 – It was hard for us to get it started, but once we worked it in it wasn't hard to complete three times a week.

#6 – Yes although got easier over time to “make time”

#7 – We have family worship every night and would have preferred a nightly curriculum.

Did you find it easier to perform the family devotions on pre-determined, particular nights of the week or did you perform them more spontaneously when you had a little extra time?

#1 – spontaneously

#2 – predetermined time

#3 – Spontaneously worked best and seemed to yield better devotionals

#4 – more spontaneously

#5 – We pretty much did it spontaneously when time allowed. But I would prefer a specific schedule to be sure we do it.

#6 – Had to be disciplined at first to “make time” but then found discussion is better when I follow their moods and spontaneously do lesson.

#7 – Predetermined time every night

Which time of day did you find worked best for your family? (ie- at breakfast; right after supper)

#1 – after bath; before bed

#2 ; #3 & #6 – before bed

#4 – evenings after supper

#5 – Easiest for us after baths when settling in for bed. Quietest time of the day here.

#7 – Every evening after dinner.

Which stories did your children enjoy or connect with the most?

#1 – David & Goliath

#3 – “A Giant Staircase to Heaven”

#4 – creation and Jesus’ birth

#5 – The beginning story – making of stars/planets; story of Noah

Rate on a scale of 1 (being the lowest) to 10 (highest) each of the following regarding your family’s experience of family devotions:

Fostered greater knowledge of the Bible:

#1 – 2

#2 - 4

#3 – 10

#4 – 5

#5 – 4

#6 – 8

#7 - 9

Spurred questions or conversations about God and other spiritual topics:

#1 – 2

#2 - 4

#3 – 10

#4 - 8

#5 -5

#6 – 9

#7 - 10

Fostered family closeness:

#1 – 1

#2 – 7

#3 – 9.5

#4 – 8

#5 – 6

#6 – 10

#7 - 10

Overall effectiveness of devotions:

#1 – 1 (“as I said it didn’t work for us”)

#2 – 7

#3 – 9.5

#4 – 8

#5 -6

#6 – 9

#7 - 10

Would you like to continue family devotions as a regular weekly practice?

#1 – maybe later

#2 , #5 , #6 & #7 – Yes

#3 – Yes, definitely

#4 – We will continue

How often would you ideally want to have a family devotion?

#1 – a few times a week

#2 – daily

#3 – ideally, every evening

#4 – again it depends on the week

#5 – at least once a week

#6 – I would love every night but I know that isn't realistic. Three times a week is a great goal.

#7 – We are committed to having nightly family worship

Would a simple curriculum be helpful (such as what was provided) or would you prefer to simply read from a children's or standard translation of the Bible?

#1 – Children's Bible/Standard Translation

#2 – Standard Translation

#3 – I would prefer a simple curriculum such as the one provided. It provided good insight and questions that sparked interest and further questions from my child.

#4 – Probably prefer to read from our children's Bible or see what thoughts/questions the kids have and go from there

#5 – We really enjoy the storybook Bible. It is a beautiful book & easy to read to small children. I found it helpful to have the curriculum to go by.

#6 – Curriculum is very helpful! I'll continue using this children's book. Also, I find my personal readings through the week are a great way to share. If I've read something meaningful I'll share that with kids.

#7 – Since we have family worship every evening it was sometimes difficult to incorporate this curriculum in for just the three nights. We would prefer some type of daily curriculum that would guide that process and include singing, memorization of scripture and would like to explore adding some form of a catechism. (perhaps “Westminster Shorter Catechism.”)

Family Devotional Curriculum

This is the basic content of the Devotional Guide which was made into a small booklet and distributed to each family along with a copy of *The Jesus Storybook Bible*.

Family Devotions:

A Forgotten Heritage & The Most Efficient & Effective Way of Growing Christ's Kingdom (Title Page)

I want to invite your family to engage in short, simple “family devotionals” 3 times per week over the next 4 weeks. I would like to know about your personal experience with family devotions in the past (if any) & what comes to mind when you hear that term; so please fill out the “Initial Family Questionnaire” before you begin. Also, after the four weeks of practicing these family devotions I would like to get feed-back about your experience & any constructive feedback on the curriculum itself. So after the four weeks please take a few minutes to fill out the “Follow-up Questionnaire.” Thanks for your thoughtful participation!

Introduction to the practice of Family Devotions

Many of us who seek to be followers of Jesus and who are now charged with passing on our faith to our children did not grow up with “family devotions.” However, go back just a generation or two and you begin to realize that among faithful Christian families some type of family devotion was very frequently a standard practice. I believe that if we truly want to train our children in the faith we as parents must reclaim our God-given roles as the primary agent of spiritual formation in our child's life. While Sunday School & youth programs are a great assist to parents in this effort, these programs were never intended to usurp the parents' primary role in their child's faith development.

Think about it for a minute. Who is better positioned to positively affect your child's faith than you? It seems logical that God placed your child in your home for a reason. No one in the world is in a better spot to help form your child's faith. Your child is in some kind of church-based program probably one or two hours per week. That leaves the other 166 hours in your hands! Unfortunately, many children of the church have wandered away from the faith in the past couple of generations because parents have basically tried to shoe-horn their child's complete faith formation into those mere two hours (or less) of “classroom” instruction. Evangelism has to start at home with our own children! The scriptures clearly teach that parents are to instruct their child not just in formal classroom environments but in the classroom of life. In Deuteronomy 6 Moses instructs parents saying, “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress

them upon your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

If we want our kids to embody a “real-world” faith then we need to teach them in the context in which they really live. I invite you to take part in a great experiment. Take time over the next four weeks to engage in an intentional time of “family devotions.” I find that many parents are intimidated or feel overwhelmed by the idea of leading devotions. Oftentimes I think parents have an image in their minds of a dull, hour long, in-depth Bible study in which they have to tie their kids to the floor with duct-tape to keep them still. Or they worry their kids will ask them hard questions that they are unable to answer.

What I am proposing is hopefully a lot less daunting and a whole lot more fun! Devotions in our home are more often the 10-15 minute variety that usually consists of reading a story from a simplified children’s Bible and then a brief discussion about the story. Devotions are usually done with younger kids sitting on laps and older children standing or hovering somewhere nearby. Then we take prayer requests and close in a short, informal prayer. That’s it! No long, drawn out readings. No deep theological lessons just telling God’s story and the story of his people. After all the Bible is not a systematic list of theology – it’s basically a collection of stories. That’s how God has chosen to reveal himself. And that’s how God has hard-wired all of us, children & adults alike, to best receive instruction and be spiritually transformed – through the power of story!

Family devotions don’t have to fit any certain structure or follow any particular method. The material in this simple curriculum is just a tool to be used however you feel it would best suit your family’s needs and your children’s age and temperaments. Remember that this is not a performance. You are not doing devotions FOR your kids but WITH them. Follow the clues they are giving you. If something in the reading brings up a topic you weren’t anticipating – Great! Go with it! The important thing is not always the content of the devotions as much as communicating to them that your faith in God is important to you and a foundation for your family. So what if they ask a question about the Bible or faith that you cannot answer. That’s a good thing! It shows that they are truly wrestling to understand their place in God’s world. If you don’t know the answer just be honest and say, “I don’t know but let’s try to find out the answer together!” Don’t take yourself too seriously! Kids can come up with some really funny questions about God: “Does God have a bedtime?”; “What’s God’s favorite color?” Just laugh & have fun with it!

Every family has its own “culture” either intentionally or unintentionally. If we are not intentional about forming a culture that values faith we will most likely just be swept along by dominate, secular, materialistic culture around us. As parents you help form that underlying culture through your every day choices and actions. Those actions and choices over time subconsciously communicate to your children what you really value in life. So

I invite you to participate in this exciting experiment to reclaim your God-given responsibility as the spiritual leaders and faith-shapers in your home!

A word about *The Jesus Storybook Bible*

I have chosen *The Jesus Storybook Bible* as the basis for these devotions. I appreciate how they try to connect each story in the Bible, including Old Testament stories, to the coming of Jesus as our “rescuer.” Each story has listed the specific scripture on which it is based. Feel free to use any other children’s Bible or whatever translation you prefer.

A word about frequency of devotions

Perhaps in an ideal world we would have family devotions every night. But I have found that for our family a goal of having 3-4 devotions per week is pretty doable without becoming legalistic. To some this may seem overly ambitious as you consider your busy lives. To others it may seem a little too low of a goal. I encourage you to play around with frequency and what works best with your children and your schedule. For the purposes of this month-long experiment I would encourage you to try it for at least the three times per week. We find that with church activities intermingled throughout the week conversations about God can develop more organically over Sunday lunch or even on the drive home with open ended questions like: “What did ya’ll talk about in Sunday School today?” And have each child share in turn. While many of us did not have family devos as a kid you do hear horror stories of people whose parents were so rigid in their practice of such religious practices that it turned them off to faith. We aren’t trying to create little religious Pharisees but balanced kids who are secure with a deep-down knowledge that God loves them and has created them for a very special purpose.

A Word About Length of Devotions

Don’t feel like you have to answer every question in the guide. If you wind up spending 10 minutes on an earlier question and the kids’ attention span is waning just chunk the rest! Oftentimes we split off the scripture memory from the Bible story and perhaps go over it at the breakfast table. Obviously younger children are going to respond better to shorter and more active storytelling. (on occasion we assign parts and have the kids act the story out while one of the parents or older child serves as narrator). Try to avoid the notion that the devotion has to be any particular length.

Family Devotions

Based on stories from “The Jesus Storybook Bible” (for children up to 12 years old)

Week One - Day 1

Scripture Memory Verse for Week 1

“Jesus said ‘I am ...the First & the Last, the Beginning and the End.’” - Revelation 22:13

(Feel free to shorten or lengthen it depending on the ages of your children.)

Read “The Story & the Song” (p.12; Based on Psalm 19 & Hebrews 1)

Questions for Discussion:

What do the stars in the sky tell us about God? (That He’s big, powerful & creative)

Why did God write the Bible? (To tell us about himself & what He has done for us)

Who is the main character of the Bible? (God himself)

What is the “Big Idea” that Bible is trying to teach us? (That God loves us & comes to rescue us.)

Introduce the memory verse of the week & go over it a few times. You can be as creative with this as you want to be: Say it with blanks “Jesus said ‘I am the _____ & the Last...” - Revelation 22:13

You can yell it; whisper it sing it or march to it.

Remember to emphasize the “biblical address”: Revelation 22.13

Closing Prayer: Explain that praying to God is not as hard as we might think. Say something like, “We don’t have to be real formal or use a lot of fancy language when talking to God. It’s just like talking to one of us – to Mom or Dad. Just imagine God as

your loving, heavenly Father sitting right here in the room with us and tell Him whatever is on your mind. Tell God how great you think He is – that’s what the Bible calls “Praising God.” Think of 2 or 3 things to Praise Him for: “God you’re great because you created all the stars.” Or “God , you’re incredible because you made us to be like you!”

Don’t feel like this prayer time has to be long (just a minute or two is great). But try to encourage each child to say even a short phrase. “God you’re great because_____.” (You created whales!)

Remember a family devotion is not something you do for your kids but with them!

Family Devotion Week One - Day 2

Read “The beginning: a perfect home” (p.18; based on Genesis 1-2)

Questions for Discussion:

What did God use to make the universe? (Nothing; He just spoke and it was there!)

Was God’s creation good or bad? (Good)

What’s some of your favorite things that God created?

What did God think of our first parents Adam & Eve? (He loved them & thought they were wonderful.) Why did He love them so much? (Because he created them to be like Him; they were made in His image.)

Do you think God loves you just like He loved Adam & Eve?

Go over memory verse of the week a few times and have each kid say it in turn. (If you feel like you don’t have time to go over the memory verse during this time you could break it up and take a different time during the day such as breakfast to go over the verse. But whatever you decide to do try to keep it at a consistent time so as to form a habit.)

Closing Prayer: Ask your kids to try to think of two things they are thankful that God created and have them say a simple prayer of thanks: “God thank you for elephants!” or “God thank you for sunshine!” You can close the time of prayer by offering other prayers of thanks.

Family Devotion Week One - Day 3

Read “The Terrible Lie” (p.28; based on Genesis 3)

What was Satan’s main sin? (Pride; He wanted to be God)

How did Satan disguise himself? (as a snake)

What was the one thing God told Adam & Eve they couldn’t do? (eat fruit from a certain tree – the tree of knowledge of good & evil)

What did God say would happen if they ate from that tree? (They would die & sadness & tears would come)

How did Satan tempt Eve? (By questioning God’s rule about the fruit. Indirectly he was questioning whether God really loved her and wanted her to be truly happy?)

Why did Adam & Eve run away from God and hide? (Because they felt guilty for disobeying and were afraid of Him.)

What did God promise to do for Adam & Eve before he sent them out of the garden? (He promised to rescue them and defeat the snake so that one day they could return to the garden & be with God again.)

Go over the memory verse together & then see if each child can say it by themselves.

Closing Prayer: Explain that like Adam & Eve we all disobey God and have sin in our hearts but when we admit to God what we've done wrong and try to be obedient God ALWAYS forgives us. Invite them to pray by saying something like: "God forgive me when I _____" (ie – "I'm mean to my brother" or "I don't listen to my Mom when she's asked me to clean up my toys.")

Optional Activity: "Temptation Game": Designate an area of your house as "off limits" for the rest of the day(or next 24 hrs). Try to think of ways to tempt a family member to go into that room throughout the day. Everyone begins with five points. If they forget & enter the "forbidden zone" or succumb to your trickery then they lose 1 point. The one with the highest point total at the end of the day is the winner!

Week Two – Day 1

Memory Verse for week 2: "God loved the people of the world so much that he gave his only Son." – John 3:16 (paraphrase) [edit - check other translations; Living; NLT]

Read "A New Beginning" (p. 38; based on Genesis 6-9)

Why did God send a great storm to flood the earth? (To wash away all the hate & sadness and to start over with just Noah & his family)

What did God ask Noah to build? (a boat called an "ark" which literally means "a box")

Why did Noah's neighbors make fun of him for making this big boat? (Because it was in the desert nowhere near water.)

How long did it rain? (40 days & nights) What do you think it would have been like inside the ark? (Smelly because of all the animals; a lot of work feeding the animals & keeping the ark clean)

What did God promise after the flood? (to never destroy the earth again)

What does the rainbow in the sky remind us of? (That God has hung up his “bow.” God’s anger against sin is now “aimed” back at Himself – at His Son Jesus who would one day sacrifice himself for our sin.)

Introduce this week’s memory verse. (listed above)

Closing Prayer: Ask the kids “Is there anything you want us to pray about or anyone we should pray for today? Let’s also remember to thank God for his promise never to destroy the earth and that Jesus took the punishment that we all deserve when he gave his life on the cross to save us from our sins.”

Optional Activity: Build an ark out of whatever materials you have around the house. (legos, Tupperware containers). Take it to a bathtub or sink and note how difficult it must have for Noah to build such a big boat that would endure stormy weather. Would you have been scared in the ark?

Week Two - Day 2

Read “A Giant Staircase to Heaven” (p.48; based on Genesis 11)

Why did the people want to build such a tall tower? (To show how great they were and to be like God.)

What earlier story from the Bible talked about a similar sin? (The story of Adam & Eve in which they wanted to be “like God.” It’s the basic sin of pride & wanting to be independent from God. Like a small child when a parent tries to help them saying, “I can do it myself!”)

How did God humble the people? (By confusing their language & making it difficult to understand one another.)

Can people “reach heaven” or “become like God” through their own hard work? (No – only by trusting in God to help them and allowing Jesus to rescue them.)

Go over memory verse for week 2. Cut out a big heart and have your child draw a picture of the world inside the heart. Talk about how big God’s heart must be to love everyone on the planet!

Closing Prayer: Pray that God would keep your humble and remember that you will always need His help no matter how big or strong your get.

Optional Activity: Build a large tower out of legos or other building blocks. When you’re halfway through start talking gibberish to one another and note how much harder it is to work together. What happens when we aren’t able to communicate easily? (We get mad or irritated with each other)

Week Two - Day 3

Read “Son of Laughter” (p.56; based on Genesis 12-21)

What kinds of things make you laugh? (funny things; surprising things)

Why did Abraham & Sarah laugh when God told them that they would have a child? (because they were so old- Abraham was 99 and Sarah 90! They were very surprised that God would want them to be parents beginning at such an old age.)

Why did God want Abraham to count the number of stars in sky? (to realize there were too many to count) How was it related to God’s promise to Abraham? (that he would have more descendents than he could count; that God would create through him a very large & special family.)

What special person would eventually come through Abraham & Sarah's children? (Many generations later Jesus, the rescuer, would eventually be born as one of their descendents. And so through their family everyone on earth would be blessed.)

What is some change in your life that you laugh at or say "that's impossible" that God might asking you to think about? (ie – God wants me to learn to read; to stop sucking my thumb; to share my toys with my little sister.)

Go over memory verse. Have each child try to say it individually.

Closing Prayer: Brainstorm things that God might be calling you to do that you think are way out of your reach.

Optional Activity: Go out tonight & try to count how many stars you see. Talk about how great God's promise to Abraham & Sarah really was!

Week Three - Stories from the New Testament; Day 1

Memory Verse for Week 3:

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness." – John 8:12

Read "He's Here!" (p. 176; based on Luke 1-2)

How did Mary feel when she first saw the angel? (scared)

What did the angel tell her? (that she would give birth to God's own Son – the Rescuer!)

Why was Jesus born in a stable? (because there was no other room in Bethlehem)

Is that where you would expect a King to be born? (no – most kings are born in a palace)

What does Emmanuel mean? (God has come to live with us.)

Why is Jesus' being born such good news? (because the promise God made all the way back in the garden of Eden to Adam & Eve is now being fulfilled through Jesus coming as the rescuer of God's people!)

Go over memory verse. (listed above)

Closing Prayer: Ask God to remind you that Jesus is always with you.

Optional Activity: Make a different kind of Christmas list. Make a list of some things you can give to someone else that doesn't cost anything but is a gift of yourself & then do one of the things on your list. (ie - give grandma a hug; visit someone who is sick or in the hospital; make a card for a shut-in & send it to them.)

Week Three - Day 2

Read "Heaven Breaks Through" (p. 200; based on Mt.3, Luke 1&3 & John 1. We've skipped the stories of the shepherds & the wisemen so that you can come back to them sometime closer to Christmas.)

What were some of the unusual things about John the Baptist? (lived in the desert; wore strange clothes; ate weird stuff)

What message did God want John to share with the people? (to stop running away from God and instead run TO God; Get ready because God's rescuer is almost here!)

How did the people show that they were sorry for running away from God? (They stopped running away and declared that they wanted to be rescued by being baptized.)

What special person did John baptize? (Jesus)

What did God the Father say to the people as Jesus came up out of the water? (this is my special son, the one I love, listen to him)

What are some everyday things that we use water for? Why is it so important? (it gives us life when we drink it; it cleans our stuff and us)

How does baptism “clean us”? (it reminds us that it is through Jesus that we are made clean and our hearts are cleaned of our sin; baptism literally means “to go under the water”)

Go over memory verse for week 3.

Closing Prayer: Ask God to help you to prepare your heart for Jesus to come & make a home there.

Optional Activity: Include the kids in washing dishes after dinner! Look at the dishes before you “baptize” them (get them to describe how yucky & dirty they look) and then have them describe how they look after rising up out of the water.

Week Three - Day 3

Read “Let’s Go!” (p.208;Mt.4; Mk.1 & Luke4-6)

What was the secret rescue plan? (that Jesus would have to die for us & our sins)

What kind of helpers did Jesus invite to help him in his work? (poor fishermen; people who realized they needed God’s help)

What did Peter, Andrew, James & John do when Jesus asked them to follow him? (they dropped everything and left it all behind)

How many people did Jesus call as his special helpers? Name as many of them as you can. (12; Peter; Andrew; James John; Matthew; Philip; Bartholomew; Thomas; another James; Simon; Thaddaeus and Judas)

How do you think their lives changed as a result of following Jesus? (they were so happy they felt like little kids again; they wanted to obey & please Jesus more than anything else)

What kinds of things might God be asking you to give up in order to be his special helper? (to give up be selfish with my toys; to think of others before I think of myself; to give up anything that I love more than God)

Go over memory verse for week three & have kids try to say it on their own.

Closing Prayer: Pray that God would help you to give up everything to follow Jesus. That God would give you the faith to give your life to Him no matter the cost, just like those first 12 disciples.

Optional Activity: Play “Jesus Says” (just like “Simon Says” but use “Jesus” instead!) Remember to do whatever Jesus says to do!

Week Four – Day 1

Memory Verse for Week 4: Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” – John 10:11

Read “A little girl & a poor frail lady” (p. 214; based on Luke 8)

Why was Jairus in such a hurry to find Jesus? (so Jesus would heal his daughter)

Why do you think Jesus took time to help the frail lady instead of rushing to help Jairus’ daughter? (Because Jesus cares about anyone who needs him, even when everyone around him is in a hurry to get going. And Jesus knew that even if Jairus’ daughter was dead he had the power to raise her to life.)

Why were the disciples so anxious for Jesus to hurry to help Jairus' daughter? (They believed Jesus could heal people but they didn't believe that Jesus had the power to raise someone from the dead - so they didn't want to be too late. They might have thought this poor, frail, old woman wasn't as important as the young daughter of the temple leader Jairus.)

What were some of the ways in which Jesus healed people? (made the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk)

What sad thing in your life do wish Jesus would make untire? (you can talk about people who are sick or other sad things that your kids are aware of (ie- some natural disaster; someone without a job))

Go over memory verse. (listed above)

Closing Prayer: Is anyone in your life or in your family sick and in need of Jesus' healing touch? Why don't take time to pray and ask Jesus to heal them right now.

Optional Activity: Make a card for someone who is sick and send it to them or pay them a visit.

Week Four - Day 2

Read "How to pray" (p.222; based on Mt. 6)

Why did the "Extra-Super-Holy People" (Pharisees) pray so loudly and use such fancy words? (because they weren't really praying sincerely to God. They just wanted to show off in front of others.)

Do you have to be really good or really holy or use really big words for God to love you or to listen to your prayers? (No. God loves everyone the same and he just wants you to talk to him like you talk to your mom or dad)

Why does God listen to us when we pray? (because He's a Loving Father to us)

What kinds of things should we pray about? (ask God to make everything in the world right again; to forgive us when we do wrong; to rescue us and keep us safe; to help us do things that make Him happy)

Memory verse activity: Have you your kids pretend to be sheep and you pretend to be the good shepherd. Have your spouse come as an attacking wolf and have the shepherd sacrifice his life to save the sheep. Talk about Jesus dying on the cross for us and what it means for Jesus to lay down his life for us.

Optional Prayer Activity: Take the Lord's prayer (Mt. 6.9-13) re-write in your own words or and break it into different parts and think of ways of asking about that for your own life. Option #2 -Say the Lord's Prayer in phrases and have your kids say it back to you as sort of a "responsive prayer" with the goal of helping them memorize it.

Week Four - Day 3

Read "The Singer" (p.228; based on Mt. 6&9; Luke 12)

Do birds have big refrigerators full of food? Do flowers have closets full of clothes?

What things do people worry about? (what clothes they're going to wear; if they will have enough food to eat; if they or their family is going to be safe)

What things do YOU worry about? (going to a new place for the first time – like school; VT losing to UNC) Or scare you? (the dark; loud noises)

What should we do when we begin to worry or get scared? (Stop and look around at the world God has made and remember how he has taken care of the birds and clothed the flowers and that we are much more precious to Him than animals and plants. Remember that God made us in His own image and he loves us like a Father.)

Go over memory verse for week 4 & have kids try to recite it on their own.

Closing Prayer: Talk to God and tell Him about any of the things you worry about which you mentioned in the question above. Ask God to help you trust Him to take care of you and provide everything you need. Option: Say the Lord's Prayer together.

Optional Activity: Make some "Anti-Worry" Cards to keep in your pocket or under your pillow. Take a few 3x5 cards and draw pictures of different birds or flowers or cut some pictures out of magazines and mount them on the cards. Underneath you can write, "Don't worry!" ; "Don't be afraid!" or "God will take care of me!"

[Congratulations! You've completed four weeks of family devotions. Please take a little time to fill out the feed-back form! Thanks for participating. I hope God has blessed you & your family through this process!]

Appendix B

Materials Related to the Second Trial: Daily Worship for Individuals

Letter of Invitation to the Practice of Daily Worship

(Sent on 5/12/11)

Dear ROPC Church Family,

As a part of my Doctor of Ministry studies I am trying to encourage the practice of daily worship within the church. Many of you already are engaged in some kind of worship on a daily basis: either prayer, Bible reading or scripture meditation or other disciplines. I am trying to gauge the benefits of: 1) How daily worship enriches our weekly corporate worship 2) How the church's practice of daily worship can be enriched by tying the daily scripture readings to Sunday's scripture text. I would love to have 25 or 30 folks from the congregation commit to using these daily scriptures and reflection questions to aid them in a practice of daily worship for the next eight weeks.

I'm inviting both those for whom daily worship is a standard practice and those for whom it would be a new discipline.

If you would be willing to be a part of this "trial run" I would greatly appreciate it. (I am intentionally keeping the definition of "daily worship" broad to allow for those who participate the freedom to incorporate this discipline into what they are already doing. The scripture passages are usually brief and I am not asking for any particular time commitment per day. The heart of any practice of daily worship is simply prayer and feeding on God's Word.)

If you are willing please sign below and place it in the offering plate. There will be some other materials which I will send to this smaller group as the study progresses. Thanks for your help!

Name:

Email:

Phone:

[The first week's scripture and questions are in the sermon notes area of the bulletin. In the future I will e-mail or send through the regular mail the readings and questions to everyone who signs up in case they were not in church that particular Sunday.]

Acts Sermon Series for Second Trial & Reflection Questions

5/15/11 – Text: Acts 6.8-7.53 ; Sermon: “Do You Have a Stiff Neck?”

Preparatory Scriptures for 5/22/11

Scriptures to aid in your daily Worship:

Week #1

Reflecting on Sunday’s Message:

Monday: James 4:1-10; In what areas of your life do you fail to submit to God?

Tuesday: Jeremiah 6:6-10; How is Jeremiah’s warning to Judah before the exile relevant to our own stubbornness today?

Preparing for next Sunday’s Message:

Wednesday: Romans 12:1-2; What does it mean to be a living sacrifice?

Thursday: Romans 12:3-8; What is the relationship between your gifts and being a living sacrifice?

Friday: Luke 23:32-34; In what ways does Stephen emulate his Lord Jesus in his death?

Saturday: Luke 9:23-27; In what way is Jesus calling on you to deny yourself? What form does this dying to self take in your life at present?

5/22/11-Text: Acts 7.54-8.4; Sermon: “A Living Sacrifice”

Week #2

Reflecting on this past Sunday:

Monday: John 15:18-25; Why did Jesus elicit such a strong reaction of hatred from those “in the world”? Have you ever felt the hatred of the world? At work or at school? Does that possibility frighten you? Are you too much of a people pleaser to ever be “hated” in the way Jesus was?

Tuesday: 1 Peter 3:13-17; When have you suffered for “doing good”? Are you prepared “to give the reason for the hope that you have” today? Is how we share our faith as important as sharing our faith?

Wednesday: James 5:7-11; What does “patience in the face of suffering” look like? Can you think of someone in your life who is a good example of this? What do you learn from their example?

Looking forward to next Sunday's Message:

Thursday: Matthew 6:25-34; What consumes your daily thoughts? Do you spend time worrying about what you will eat or drink or wear? Jesus says to "seek first his kingdom". What might that look like for you in the choices you make today?

Friday: Mark 1:14-20; When Jesus preaches, "The kingdom of God is near" (v.15) why is that "good news"(v.14)? What is the relationship between our repentance and God's Kingdom? In what ways is God calling you to repent in order to make His Kingdom more widely known & accepted in this world?

Saturday: Revelation 5:6-14; According to this revelation how would you describe the Kingdom of God? What does it mean to be a part of that Kingdom? What concrete action can you take today to help reveal God's reign and rule in your life and in the lives of those around you?

5/29/11 - Text: Matthew 6:5-15; Sermon: "Praying God's Heart" (Guest Preacher)

Week #3

Reflecting on this past Sunday

Monday: Luke 15; What is the common theme in these three parables? Why is God's heart with the lost? Where is your heart? What lost soul could you pray for today? What practical step could you take today to reach out with Jesus' love to someone you know or come into contact with who is lost?

Tuesday: Read Psalm 139; What comfort do you derive from being known by God intimately? Is that intimacy disconcerting? Ask God to search your own heart & root out any "offensive way" in you. Seek God's heart as you go about your day's business.

Preparing for the upcoming Sunday:

Wednesday: 2 Timothy 3:1-16; What does it mean to have a "form of godliness" but deny its power? How do you limit the Holy Spirit's power as you pursue godliness? How do the scriptures and the Spirit's power work together to make you "thoroughly equipped for every good work?"

Thursday: Matthew 15:1-20 How does Jesus describe righteousness? Why do we tend to concentrate on external rather than internal righteousness? What steps can you take today to correct this?

Friday: Matthew 12:28-50; Why are humans so entranced by miraculous signs? In what way can this become spiritually unhealthy? Are you seeking God for what He can do for you or for who He is?

Saturday: Matthew 13:1-23; Why does the scattering of the seed have such varying results? How is this parable an encouragement as we share our faith? How is God calling you to scatter seed today?

6/5/11 –Text: Acts 8.5-25; Sermon: “The Power of a Right Heart Before God”

Week #4

Reflecting Back on Sunday’s Message:

Monday: Psalm 51; How would you describe David’s awareness of his own sin? How is that awareness a blessing to him? Do you have a pure heart? What do you need to confess today?

Tuesday: Matthew 23; How would you summarize Jesus’ condemnation of the Pharisees? Do you “practice what you preach”? What aspects of your life could be labeled “hypocritical”? What steps could you take today to avoid the trap of the hypocrisy?

Looking Ahead to next Sunday:

Wednesday: Acts 8:4-8;26-40; How would you describe Philip? Was God already at work in the Ethiopian’s life before Philip arrived? In what ways could you emulate Philip today?

Thursday: Acts 17:16-34; What approach does Paul use to share the gospel with the Athenians? Was God already at work in the hearts of the Athenians before Paul arrived? How might you build on the work that God is already doing in an unbeliever’s life? Can you name someone God is calling you to reach out to?

Friday: Luke 10:1-17; How does Jesus send out the disciples? What instructions does he give them? To whom is God sending you? Do you have a partner in mission with whom you can proclaim God’s kingdom?

Saturday: Matthew 28:16-20; What does Jesus command you to do? How are you living out the Great Commission? What great promise does Jesus make that will aid you in fulfilling this commission? Do you sense Jesus with you as you “make disciples” & teach them everything Jesus has commanded you?

6/12 –Text: Acts 8.26-40; Sermon: “The Power of Evangelism”

Weekly Worship Week #5

Monday – John 4:1-42; How would you describe Jesus’ approach to evangelism? How might you apply some of the same principles in your own efforts to reach out to lost souls?

Tuesday – Matthew 8:1-13; What does Jesus interaction with the leper and the centurion tell us about his model of evangelism? Jesus often reached out to outsiders. Who is on the “outside” of the church with whom God wants you to make a connection?

Looking ahead to next Sunday:

Wednesday - Acts 9:1-31; Why do you think Saul was struck blind? What purpose did it fulfill? How does Jesus' identification with the persecuted (v.4) encourage you? How do you know when a conversion is genuine? Reflect on your own conversion experience. Was it sudden or more gradual?

Thursday – Matthew 5:38-48; Is Jesus' teaching seem radical? Why does Jesus call us to "love our enemies"? What is Jesus' ultimate goal? Who are your "enemies"? Who is God calling you to reach out to in love?

Friday – Daniel 6 – What did Daniel do to be used by God? How did he make an enemy into an ally? How might you follow Daniel's example in your daily life?

Saturday – 1 Samuel 24; How did David treat Saul? What effect did David's respect of Saul have on Saul's attitude toward David? Is God calling you to rise above someone's mistreatment of you and respond with love instead of further animosity?

Daily Worship Week #6

6/19/11 – Text: Acts 9.1-31; Sermon: "The Power to Turn 'Enemies' Into Allies"

Monday: Luke 6:27-42; How is our treatment of our "enemies" related to God's treatment of us? How has God been merciful toward you? How is God calling you to "bless" those who "curse" you?

Tuesday: Romans 5:6-20; How would you describe the quality of God's love for you? How might the hate or sin of an "enemy" be defused by a righteous act of unconditional love? How might one act of unconditional love alter the landscape in a "broken" relationship? How can you follow Jesus' example of unconditional love and complete sacrifice?

Looking ahead to next Sunday's message:

Wednesday: Acts 9.32-43; Who does Peter say heals Aeneas? How does that differ from our modern perception of healing? Why were the saints in Joppa so anxious when Tabitha died? To whom is God calling you to visit and pray for? How is God calling you to be an instrument of healing to those around you?

Thursday: Luke 7:11-17; What motivated Jesus to raise this particular man from the dead? Surely there were countless numbers of dead that Jesus chose not to raise. How did the people respond? How might God be calling you to minister to someone who has experienced a great loss?

Friday: Luke 4:14-30; How would you describe Jesus' mission based on the passage he read from Isaiah? Who do you know that needs "good news", "freedom from captivity", "recovery of

sight”, or “release from oppression”? What form might these maladies take in the people you meet in the course of your day?

Saturday: Acts 3:1-16; What did the beggar originally want from Peter & John? How did Peter respond? Peter saw past the man’s “felt need” to a deeper need? How often do people present needs that are only on the surface? How do you use that “felt need” to address deeper, spiritual needs? Can you think of anyone specific to whom you can minister or begin to pray for who real needs lie far beneath the surface?

6/26/11 – Text: Acts 9.32-43; Sermon: “The Power to Heal”

Week #7

Monday: 2 Kings 5:1-18; Why was Naaman so offended by what Elisha asked him to do? How did this “outer” healing effect inner healing? What simple step might God be calling you to take in order to bring healing in your life or in the life of someone you know?

Tuesday: Luke 8:40-56; How was the suffering woman healed? How would you describe her faith? Do you have such faith? What is the importance of touch in the healing process? How are you being called to reach out and “touch” someone with the healing power of the gospel?

Wednesday: Psalm 103; What “benefits” of the Lord should you not forget today? Is there ever a connection between sin and health? (v.3) David says “everywhere is his dominion”(v.22). How should that fact affect our comfort in trial and confidence in ministry?

Thursday: 1 Peter 2; What does it mean to be a “royal priesthood, a holy nation”? (v.9) How is that fact an encouragement as you strive to “abstain from sinful desires”? (v.11) How has Jesus healed you? (v.24)

Friday: Revelation 22; How does this vision of the consummation of all things sustain you for living in today’s world? How is your service for Jesus an anticipation of his ultimate return? How might the church work toward “the healing of the nations” in the present world? (v.2)

Saturday: Matthew 10; What kinds of things does Jesus give his disciples the authority to do? Just as the disciples were sent to proclaim the kingdom in word & in deed – so Jesus is sending you. How might you proclaim to the lost souls you encounter today that “the kingdom of God is near”?

7/3/11- Text: John 21:1-25; Sermon: “Independence Day” (Guest Preacher)

Week #8

Monday: Read Acts 10; Why was it was hard for Peter to accept this change? What barriers was God breaking down? What barriers exist in the world today? In your personal world?

Tuesday: Matthew 18:10-35; What part does forgiveness play in reconciliation within the church? How have you reacted recently when someone sinned against you? How does Jesus describe the connection between forgiving our brother and God's forgiving us? Who do you need to forgive today?

Wednesday: Psalm 130; Does God keep a "record of" your sins?(v.3) Isn't that a relief?! Are you keeping a "record" on anyone? What does it mean to "wait on the Lord"? In what area of your life do you need to wait more patiently for God to act?

Thursday: Eph.4:1-16; What actions or attitudes help the church "keep the unity of the Spirit"? Why was this so important for the early church? Why is it important for us today? How is God calling you to live out His call to "bear with one another in love"?

Friday: John 17:1-23; What does Jesus pray for his disciples? Why was the unity of his followers so important to Jesus? To what does Jesus compare our oneness with each other? How are you either contributing to or detracting from the unity of the followers of Jesus?

Saturday: 2 Corinthians 5:11-21; How have you been reconciled to God? What does a "ministry of reconciliation" look like? In what ways are you "a new creation"? How does that work of "new creation" assist in forming the "message of reconciliation"?

Follow-up Questionnaire for those who participated
in the second trial's daily worship readings.
(Distributed 7/31/11)

1. If you were speaking with friend who is a non-believer but who seemed curious about your faith how would you define the word "worship"?
2. Imagine you had a teenager living in your home how would you explain why worship of God is so important to you and to anyone's pursuit of a meaningful life?
3. Describe your practice of daily worship before beginning this exercise? How often per week? What length? What spiritual disciplines did you typically use?(ie – prayer, scripture reading, scripture memorization, scriptural meditation, fasting, journaling, prayer with others)
4. Did you use these readings as an individual or among family or friends? In general do you find worshiping with others on a daily basis- either fellow family members or with friends – increases the depth or frequency of your daily worship?
5. If you were already engaging in daily worship did you simply add this daily worship exercise to what you were already doing or did it replace your normal practice?

6. In what ways did participating in this exercise change or affect your daily practice?
7. How did your understanding of worship grow or evolve over this period of time?
8. On average how often per week did you use the daily worship reading & reflection questions? When you did use the readings how many minutes would you typically spend on them & in reflection or prayer?
9. What were the most helpful or useful aspects of the daily readings?
10. What were the least helpful aspects?
11. Did the attempt to tie the readings into the Sunday sermon enrich or detract from the experience?
12. What made this daily practice challenging?
13. What changes could be made to either the format of the daily worship exercises or the content that would make them more effective at promoting a consistent practice daily worship? How might we keep one another accountable and encouraged to be more consistent in our practice of daily worship?

Appendix C

Materials Related to the Third Trial

[Sermon Schedule Based on the E100 Readings]

1/1/12 – Gen 1&2(E100 Reading #1) – “It All Begins with God”

1/8/12 – Gen 3(#2) – “The Fall”

1/15/12 – Gen 12(#6) – “The Call of Abraham”

1/22/12 – Gen 45(#15) – “The Life of Joseph: A Lesson in God’s Providence”

1/29/12 – Ex 12(#19) - “Christ: Our Passover Lamb”

2/5/12 – Joshua 5&6(#25) - “Tumbling Walls”

2/12/12 – Judges 6&7(#28) – “Gideon’s 300”

2/19/12 – 2 Samuel 6(#35) – “David: A Man After God’s Own Heart”

2/26/12 – 1 Kings 18:16-46(#39) - “Elijah & the Prophets of Baal”

3/4/12 - Psalm 103 (#43) – “Praise the Sovereign LORD”

3/11/12 – Isaiah (#46) – “X the Suffering Servant”

3/18/12 – Matthew 3.13-4.17 (#55) – “The Temptation of Jesus”

3/25/12 – Matt.13 (#58) - “What is the Kingdom of Heaven Like?”

4/1/12 – Palm Sunday; John 11 (#65) - “Raising Lazarus From the Dead”

4/8/12 – Easter Sunday; John 20 (#69) - “The Power of the Resurrection”

4/15/12 – Acts 2:42-47(#71) - “Real Church: Authentic Community”

4/22/12 – Acts 9:1-31(#76) - “The Road to Damascus”

4/29/12 – Guest Preacher (not based on the E100 readings)

5/6/12 – Romans 8(#81) – “Destined to Be Like Christ”

5/13/12 – 2 Corinthians 4 (#92) – “A New Creation”

5/20/12 – Last E100 Sermon: Rev.21 (#100) - “New Heaven & New Earth”

[Follow-up letter to those who participated in the third trial.]

May 25, 2012

Dear Friends in Christ,

First of all I want to congratulate you on participating in the Essential 100 Bible Reading program! I hope it was a meaningful experience for you!

Secondly, I want to ask a favor of you. I have enclosed a brief survey asking you about your personal experience of taking part in the E100 readings. My Doctor of Ministry thesis project has to do with the importance of daily worship and how it is a key to spiritual transformation. Your time in filling out the survey and mailing it back to the church with the postage paid return envelope in the next couple of weeks will greatly aid me in my work and would be deeply appreciated! Even if you only completed some of the readings I urge you to still please fill out the survey and send it in! The more honest and open you can be with your responses the more effective tool the survey will be.

Please don't hesitate to call (783-3412) or email me (preacheral@aol.com) if you have any questions or additional feedback.

Yours in Christ,

Alan Gray

Questionnaire for those who participated
in the E100 Challenge (5/25/12)

1. Briefly describe your previous practice of daily worship or Bible reading prior to beginning the E100 challenge?
How often per week? _____
What length of time? _____
What length of readings? _____
Other practices (prayer, scripture memorization, etc.) _____
2. On average how often did you do the E100 readings?
Daily _____ 5 times per week _____ 2-3 times per week _____
Other _____ Avg. length of time spent per reading _____
3. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being the lowest; 10 being the highest) how would you say the E100 readings positively affected your sense of closeness to God throughout the week? (ie – “10” [Highest rating; “definitely helped me feel closer to God throughout the week”] – “1” [Lowest rating; “had no effect on my sense of spiritual connection to God during the week”].] _____
4. Did you use the E100 readings 1) individually 2) among family or 3) with others in a small group? (Circle any that apply)
5. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being the lowest; 10 being the highest) how effective were the daily readings at prompting a personal time of worship as opposed to simply an intellectual exercise? (10 – “felt very worshipful & led to other spiritual exercises like prayer”; 1 – “felt rather dry & became simply an intellectual exercise”) _____
6. On a scale of 1-10 (1 – lowest; 10 - highest) how helpful or encouraging was connecting the E100 readings to Sunday’s sermons and Wednesday night Bible Studies? _____
7. On a scale of 1-10(1 – lowest; 10 – highest) how has participating in this exercise positively affected your continuing and future practice of daily worship and scripture reading? (1 – “has had no effect”; 10 – “has strongly inspired me to continue reading scripture daily.”) _____
8. What were the most helpful or useful aspects of the E100 readings? What did you like about it?
9. What were the least helpful aspects? How could it be improved to be a more effective tool for promoting daily worship and a closer relationship with God?
10. On a scale of 1-10(1 – lowest, “Not important”; 10 – highest, “very important”) how important is daily worship in helping Christians become better disciples of Jesus Christ? _____ You personally? _____

E100 Survey Results

(Raw data from all 30 respondents)

Question #1 Briefly describe your previous practice of daily worship or Bible reading prior to beginning the E100 challenge?

1a) How often per week? _____

Mean Response: 3 times per week

Respondents:

#1) 5-7	10)4-5	19)5-6	26) 5
2) once	11)3-5	20)inconsistently	27)1
3) 1	12)2	21)occasional	28)5-7
4)sporadic	13)4-5	22)7	29)1
5)6-7	14)-	23)5-6	30)4-5
6)7	15)5-6	24)0 (only	
7)7	16)2-3	Sundays in	
8)2	17)1-2	church)	
9)3-4	18)5	25) 2-3	

1b) What length of time? _____

Average Range: 15-20 minutes

Respondents: (all responses in minutes)

#1)20-30	11)5	21)30-60
2) 5	12)20	22)30-45
3)30	13)10	23)10-20
4)10-15	14)-	24)0
5)6-7	15)15-30	25)10-30
6)20-30(am+pm)	16)15	26)30
7)15+	17)15	27)30
8)-	18)20-30	28)10-20
9)30	19)15-20	29)15
10)20	20)15-45	30)15

1c) What length of readings? _____

Mean response: Slightly less than 1 chapter per day

- | | | |
|---------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 1)1-2chapters | 12)- | 22)- |
| 2)1 ch. | 13)1 ch. | 23)1ch. |
| 3)varied | 14)- | 24)0 |
| 4)1 ch. | 15)devotional+scripture | 25)1-2ch. |
| 5)1-2 ch. | 16)devotional | 26)varied |
| 6)2 ch. | 17)1-2ch. | 27)30 minutes |
| 7)- | 18)3-4ch. | 28)1ch.+devotional |
| 8)- | 19)several | 29)with sermon |
| 9)- | verses+devotional | 30)1ch. |
| 10)varied | 20)1-3ch. | |
| 11)5-10 min | 21)varied/3-4ch. | |

1d) Other practices (prayer, scripture memorization, etc.)_____

- 1) prayer/read through the Bible
- 2)-
- 3) prayer to/from work
- 4) regular prayer
- 5) daily prayer
- 6) Upper Room, Daily Bread,Ps.23 & Ps.121 daily
- 7)-
- 8)-
- 9) prayer; devotional books(ie- "Streams in the Desert")
- 10) prayer; memorization; Bible studies; Christian books; Christian music in van
- 11) prayer
- 12)-
- 13) prayer/memorize scripture
- 14)-
- 15) prayer/music
- 16) prayer – adoration/thanksgiving
- 17) daily prayer

- 18) daily prayer
- 19) prayer
- 20) consistent prayer/inconsistent devotionals
- 21) read Bible in a year
- 22) 365 Daily Bible
- 23)-
- 24) prayer- daily frequently
- 25) "Beth Moore Bible study"/prayer
- 26) prayer
- 27) prayer
- 28) prayer
- 29) seasonal Bible study
- 30) prayer

Question #2 On average how often did you do the E100 readings?

Daily____ 5 times per week____ 2-3 times per week____ Other____ Avg.
length of time spent per reading____(in minutes)

Mean Response: 5 times per week

- | | | |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1)daily/- | 11)5/- | 22)daily/- |
| 2)daily/15min | 12)2-3/15 | 23)2-3/20-30 |
| 3)2-3/30-60 | 13)daily/10-15 | 24)2-3/15 |
| 4)5/15-20 | 14)5/- | 25)5/10-20 |
| 5)daily/30 | 15)5/15-30 | 26)5/- |
| 6)daily/20-30+ | 16)daily/15 | 27)1/30 |
| 7)daily/- | 17)daily/- | 28)daily/10-20 |
| 8)daily/60 | 18)2-3/20 | 29)2-5/- |
| 9)3-4/20 | 19)5/15-20 | 30)daily/15 |
| 10)2-3/15 | 20)2-3/45-60 | |
| | 21)5/45-60 | |

Question #3 On a scale of 1-10 (1 being the lowest; 10 being the highest) how would you say the E100 readings positively affected your sense of closeness to God throughout the week? (ie – "10" [Highest rating; "definitely helped me feel closer to God throughout the week"] – "1" [Lowest rating; "had no effect on my sense of spiritual connection to God during the week".]

Mean Response: 8

- | | | | |
|-------|------|------|--------------|
| 1)5-6 | 4)7 | 8)5 | 12)unchanged |
| 2) 10 | 5)- | 9)8 | 13)9 |
| 3)8 | 6)10 | 10)9 | 14)8 |
| | 7)9 | 11)9 | 15)10 |

16)10	20)7	24)7	28)7
17)10	21)7	25)8	29)9
18)5	22)10	26)8	30)8
19)10	23)7	27)8	

Question #4 Did you use the E100 readings 1) individually 2) among family or 3) with others in a small group? (Circle any that apply)

Individually: All respondents circled "individually".

Among Family: Respondent #'s: 2, 3, 21, 23, 24, 29, 30

With Small Group: Repsondent #'s: 14, 16, 29, 30

Q.#5 On a scale of 1-10 (1 being the lowest; 10 being the highest) how effective were the daily readings at prompting a personal time of worship as opposed to simply an intellectual exercise? (10 – "felt very worshipful & led to other spiritual exercises like prayer"; 1 – "felt rather dry & became simply an intellectual exercise") _____

Mean Response: 7

1)5	16)8
2)10	17)6
3)6	18)5
4)6	19)8
5)10; "prompted me to be more consistent"	20)5
6)9; "had established a routine. E100 help with more 'reading power'"	21)6
7)9	22)9
8)5	23)7
9)8	24)7
10)7	25)8
11)7	26)7
12)6	27)5
13)8	28)7
14)7	29)6
15)7	30)7

Q#6 On a scale of 1-10 (1 – lowest; 10 - highest) how helpful or encouraging was connecting the E100 readings to Sunday's sermons and Wednesday night Bible Studies? _____

Mean Response: 8.3; Median Response: 9

1) 9-10; "helpful"	5) 1	10) 10
2) 9; "sometimes got too far ahead"	6) 5	11) 8
3) 8	7) 9	12) 8
4) 5	8) 7	13) 10
	9) 10	14) 9

15) 5	21) 8	27) 5
16) 10	22) 10	28) 10
17) 10	23) 10	29) 10
18) 8	24) 10	30) 7
19) 10	25) 10	
20) 9	26) 10	

Q#7 On a scale of 1-10(1 – lowest; 10 – highest) how has participating in this exercise positively affected your continuing and future practice of daily worship and scripture reading? (1 – “has had no effect”; 10 – “has strongly inspired me to continue reading scripture daily.”) _____

Mean Response: 7.2; Median Response: 8

1) 8	12) 5	22) 10
2) 2	13) 8	23) 7
3) 10	14) 8	24) 5
4) 6	15) 8	25) 10
5) 8	16) 8	26) 8
6) 10	17) 8	27) 8
7) 7	18) 3; “was planning to anyway”	28) 5
8) 5	19) 10	29) 6
9) 7	20) 7	30) 8
10) 7	21) 7	
11) 8		

Q#8 What were the most helpful or useful aspects of the E100 readings? What did you like about it?

- 1) Punchouts/overview of the Bible
- 2) All good
- 3) Organized in short readings; manageable in a daily schedule of work and family
- 4) Prompted me to have a daily Bible and prayer time
- 5) Helped me realize how important to put God first by reading/praying early in the morning
- 6) We live in relationship with God in which we become more like Jesus – new life.
- 7) Structured; fellowship with others
- 8) Learning about parts I never knew before
- 9) Guidance to pray, read, reflect, apply and pray. Exposure to all of the Bible.
- 10) Connection with Sunday mornings and other times
- 11) Helpful to have a goal and designated readings versus just opening the Bible randomly
- 12) –
- 13) Put us back on track – high priority for Christians
- 14) –
- 15) Moved quicker through the books; greater sense of accomplishment
- 16) Congregation/friends; we were doing it together; informational; fun Old Testament; study together

- 17) Short passages made it easier to have time to read them; Sunday morning link!
- 18) Linked with Sunday morning sermons
- 19) Gave overview of Bible from beginning to end
- 20) Understandable and familiar; well organized; highlight major events; wanted to read more
- 21) Cut to the chase; eliminated difficult or repetitive readings
- 22) Prepared me for Sunday sermons and what to expect during the week
- 23) Liked pre-reading before Sunday sermons
- 24) Loved the connection between readings and sermon. Took it out of history and into present.
- 25) Prompted contextual reading; questions prompted more thought
- 26) Having scheduled scripture helps discipline; use one year Bible (for everyone?)
- 27) Good concise thread of the Gospel message
- 28) Good overview of the Bible- God's plan and grace; sermons and Wednesday night Bible studies very helpful
- 29) Short & best scriptures in logical sequence
- 30) Group working together

Q#9 What were the least helpful aspects? How could it be improved to be a more effective tool for promoting daily worship and a closer relationship with God?

- 1) More commentary; understand context; companion commentary?
- 2) n/a
- 3) only 100 days
- 4) some readings were a struggle; commentary with context
- 5) need certain time to devote to Bible reading/prayer
- 6) details- commentary
- 7) –
- 8) None
- 9) –
- 10) The sense of it being a task to mark off my “to do” list; not sure anyway around that guilt
- 11) –
- 12) –
- 13) More motivation needed “as weeks went on”
- 14) –
- 15) How to use or application to practical/ daily living and events
- 16) Could be improved with once a month large group study & reflection
- 17) Skipped around a lot & left out so many other things in the Bible
- 18) It “skipped” so much good stuff in the Bible
- 19) Need questions to promote deeper thought
- 20) Later in the series readings more difficult; random reading of difficult passages – discouraging & meaningless
- 21) Look forward to use
- 22) Really didn't need any improvement
- 23) –
- 24) Get bogged down in lengthy passages – “I'm lazy about ‘study’”

- 25) None – anytime spent in the word is helpful
- 26) No negatives
- 27) Preferred to read at least one week's worth at one time/ better understanding
- 28) Some more background and spiritual applications
- 29) No changes needed
- 30) Better flow

Q#10 On a scale of 1-10(1 – lowest, “Not important”; 10 – highest, “very important”) how important is daily worship in helping Christians become better disciples of Jesus Christ?” _____ You personally?

Mean Response: Christians: 8.8; Personally: 8.1

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1) Christians: 10/ Personally: yes | 16) 10/10 |
| 2) 10/10 | 17) 10/10 |
| 3) 10/10 | 18) 10/10 |
| 4) 10/8 | 19) 10/10 |
| 5) -/10 | 20) 8/4 |
| 6) 10/10 | 21) 8/7 |
| 7) 9/great | 22) 10/10 |
| 8) -/7 | 23) 10/10 |
| 9) 10/10 | 24) 10/10 |
| 10) 10/10 | 25) 10/10 |
| 11) 10/10 | 26) 10/10 |
| 12) 3/3 | 27) 8/8 |
| 13) 10/10 | 28) 10/10 |
| 14) 9/9 | 29) 10/10 |
| 15) 10/- | 30) 10/9 |

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VITA

Name: Frederick Alan Gray

Birthplace: Charlotte, North Carolina

Birth Date: June 18, 1966

Education: Bachelor of Arts, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (1988)
Double Major in Religious Studies and Speech Communication

Master of Divinity, Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California (1993)

Ordination: Minister of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (USA) (1993)

Churches Served: Darnestown Presbyterian Church in Gaithersburg,
Maryland (1993-1999)
Royal Oak Presbyterian Church in Marion, Virginia (1999-present)

Family: Kelley, wife (married on March 23, 1991) and their three children: Aidan, Collin
and Lily

Doctor of Ministry Studies Began: February, 2009

Expected Graduation Date: May, 2016